ASCENDANCE OF A BOOKWORM
I'll do anything to become a librarian!
Part 4 Founder of the Royal Academy's So-Called Library Committee Vol. 6
Author: Miya Kazuki
Illustrator: You Shiina

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Cast of Characters

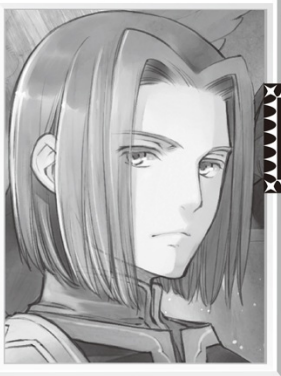
Rozemyne
The protagonist.
After growing a little, she now looks like an eight-year-old, but she still hasn't changed on the inside. She will do anything she can to read books in the Royal Academy, which she is attending as a second-year.

Ehrenfest's Archduke Candidates

Wilfried
Sylvester's oldest son, Rozemyne's older brother, and a second-year at the Royal Academy.

Charlotte
Sylvester's daughter, Rozemyne's little sister, and a first-year at the Royal Academy.

Rozemyne's Guardians



Ferdinand
Sylvester's half-brother and Rozemyne's guardian.

Sylvester
The archduke of Ehrenfest. He adopted Rozemyne, making him her adoptive father.

Florencia
Sylvester's wife and the mother of his three children. Rozemyne's adoptive mother.

Karstedt
The commander of Ehrenfest's knights. Rozemyne's noble father.

Elvira
Karstedt's first wife. Rozemyne's noble mother.

Bonifatius
Sylvester's uncle, Karstedt's father, and Rozemyne's grandfather.

Summary of Part Three:

Rozemyne was exceedingly busy after becoming a noble, with her work as the High Bishop and the archduke's adopted daughter having left her with very little spare time. She finished the printing press, sold karuta and playing cards in the castle, and made steady progress in her aim to proliferate books. The atmosphere became a lot more tense when Georgine visited, however. Wilfried fell victim to a political trap, and Charlotte was kidnapped, during which Rozemyne almost died of poisoning. Rozemyne was soaked in a jureve to recover, but when she awoke, two whole years had passed.

Rihyarda
Head attendant. An archnoble who cared for Ferdinand, Sylvester, and Karstedt when they were kids.

Lieseleta
Angelica's little sister and a fifth-year apprentice medattendant.

Brunhilde
A fourth-year apprentice archattendant.

Hartmut
A sixth-year apprentice archscholar. Ottilie's son.

Philine
A second-year apprentice layscholar.

Cornelius
Karstedt's son and a sixth-year apprentice archknight.

Leonore
A fifth-year apprentice archknight.

Judithe
A third-year apprentice medknight.

Rozemyne's Retainers

Damuel
A layknight. Stayed in Ehrenfest.

Angelica
A medknight. Stayed in Ehrenfest.

Ottilie
Hartmut's mother and an archattendant.

Rozemyne's Personnel

- Ella……Personal chef.
- Hugo……Personal chef.
- Rosina……Personal musician.

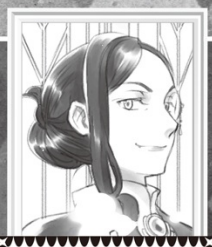
Ehrenfest Students

- Ignaz……A third-year apprentice archscholar serving Wilfried.
- Marianne……A third-year apprentice archscholar serving Charlotte.
- Kathrein……A fourth-year apprentice medscholar serving Charlotte.
- Traugott……A fourth-year apprentice archknight. Rihyarda's grandson.
- Matthias……A fourth-year apprentice medknight in the former Veronica faction.
- Laurenz……A third-year apprentice medknight in the former Veronica faction.

Roderick
A second-year apprentice medscholar in the former Veronica faction.

Royal Academy Professors

Primevere……Klassenberg's dorm supervisor.
Rauffen……Dunkelfelger's dorm supervisor.
Gundolf……Drewanchel's dorm supervisor.
Fraularm……Ahrensbach's dorm supervisor.
Pauline……Frenbeltag's dorm supervisor and a music professor.
Renatus……Hauchletzte's dorm supervisor and the oldest professor on the knight course.



Hirschur
Ehrenfest's dorm supervisor. Previously taught Ferdinand.

Solange
The Royal Academy's librarian.

Other Royal Academy Figures

Hildebrand
The Sovereignty's third prince.

Schwartz……A library magic tool.
Weiss……A library magic tool.
Arthur……Hildebrand's head attendant.

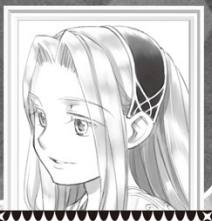
Hannelore
A second-year archduke candidate from Dunkelfelger.

Adolphine
A sixth-year archduke candidate from Drewanchel.

Students of Other Duchies

Lestilaut……A fifth-year archduke candidate from Dunkelfelger.
Clarissa……A fifth-year apprentice archscholar from Dunkelfelger.
Raimund……A third-year apprentice medscholar from Ahrensbach. Hirschur's disciple.
Rudiger……A sixth-year archduke candidate from Frenbeltag.

Ortwin
A second-year archduke candidate from Drewanchel.



Detlinde
A fifth-year archduke candidate from Ahrensbach. Georgine's daughter.

Ehrenfest's Nobility

Eckhart……Ferdinand's guard knight. Karstedt's son.
Justus……Ferdinand's scholar. Rihyarda's son.
Lamprecht……Wilfried's guard knight. Karstedt's son.
Aurelia……Lamprecht's bride.
Bettina……Freuden's bride.
Ernesta……Charlotte's guard knight. Stayed in Ehrenfest.
Veronica……Sylvester's mother. Currently detained.

Temple Attendants

Fran……In charge of the High Bishop's chambers.
Zahm……In charge of the High Bishop's chambers.
Nicola……A cook who helps in the High Bishop's chambers.
Monika……A cook who helps in the High Bishop's chambers.
Gil……In charge of the workshop.
Fritz……In charge of the workshop.
Wilma……In charge of the orphanage.

Nobles Elsewhere

Sigiswald……The Sovereignty's first prince.
Anastasius……The Sovereignty's second prince.
Eglantine……A member of the Klassenberg archducal family.
Georgine……Ahrensbach's first wife. Sylvester's older sister.

Other

Shuu……Rozemyne's childhood friend and neighbor from her Urano days.

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Prologue

Charlotte’s curls bounced as she stepped atop the teleportation portal with her head attendant Vanessa beside her. She was heading to the Royal Academy for the first time—the thought alone made her heart pound with excitement and anxiety.

“Farewell, Lady Charlotte. May you enjoy the Royal Academy.”

One by one, her adult retainers saw her off with a smile, starting with Ernesta. Her parents, in contrast, gave her a list of warnings with uneasy and concerned expressions.

“Listen up, Charlotte,” Sylvester said. “I need as many eyes in the Royal Academy as possible to make sure the intel we’re receiving is accurate. I’ve already given the same order to Wilfried and Rozemyne, but I want you to send me daily reports of what you’ve seen, what you’ve heard, and what you’ve done in your classes.”

“Yes, Father.”

“As you have noticed, you cannot trust Rozemyne in social situations,” Florencia added. “Not only was she raised in the temple, but she continues to spend much time there, and circumstances mean she has two fewer years of education than anyone else. There are many who will wish to socialize with the girl who is the source of all our trends, but those of other duchies will not properly grasp her situation. I realize this is quite the burden for you to accept in your first year, but please support her as best you can as a fellow female archduke candidate.”

Charlotte realized that her parents’ concerns were more about how she would support her older brother and sister than anything else. Her chance to become the next aub was gone owing to Wilfried and Rozemyne’s engagement, and now, rather than honing her own talents, she was expected to focus on aiding her two siblings. She understood that it was necessary for the future of Ehrenfest, but as an archduke candidate herself, she couldn’t help but feel unsatisfied.

Still... This is my opportunity to repay my sister.

Charlotte could still see flashes of the time she had been kidnapped, when Rozemyne had so bravely come to her rescue. That incident was the reason for Rozemyne's two-year slumber, and yet she had not said a word of reproach to Charlotte regarding her loss. In fact, much the opposite—she was going to great lengths to make her younger sister's life easier. Charlotte wanted even the smallest opportunity to repay her debt of gratitude.

"I will strive to be of use to my sister," Charlotte replied with the best smile she could manage. And with that, she teleported to the Royal Academy.

"Welcome back, Lady Charlotte," Vanessa said upon her lady's return to her dormitory room. "How was your first fellowship gathering? You were quite nervous before you left."

"My dear sister helped soothe my worries," Charlotte replied with a faint smile and shake of her head. The very thought of relying on her older sister had overwritten her previous feelings of anxiety—after all, there was nothing to be more anxious about than what Rozemyne might do without someone keeping tabs on her.

"I am glad to hear it," Vanessa said. "Now then, let us write our report on the gathering."

Charlotte headed to her work desk with Marianne, a scholar apprentice, who picked up a board and a pen. "So, Lady Charlotte—what about the fellowship gathering was new to you or left a particular impression on you?" she asked.

"Hm... I was surprised that Sovereign food does not taste as good as what we serve in Ehrenfest," Charlotte replied. She had expected dishes prepared by the Sovereignty—dishes that were enjoyed by royalty—to be unlike any she had ever eaten before. "Of course, the food served was still nice. It simply did not live up to my expectations from when I was younger, when Father and Mother sang its praises upon returning from the Archduke Conference."

Marianne began to giggle, as did Charlotte's other retainers. Charlotte's childish disappointment was clear to see, despite her best efforts to disguise it.

"That would be because Ehrenfest food has changed dramatically since the adoption of Lady Rozemyne's recipes," Marianne explained. "In the

past, Sovereign food truly did taste better."

"You may not have noticed, since the food available here in the dormitory is the same as that served in the castle, but there are few who are fortunate enough to enjoy Lady Rozemyne's recipes on a daily basis, even in the Noble's Quarter," Natalie remarked. "I can assure you that the knight dorms are not afforded such a privilege."

It was only then that Charlotte realized how blessed she was. She had been only five years old when Rozemyne was baptized, so she had very little recollection of the food previously served in Ehrenfest.

"Lady Charlotte, how did the archduke candidates of other duchies seem to you?" the apprentice attendant Kathrein asked, bringing the conversation back on track. Charlotte recalled her experience during the greetings.

"The other duchies were focused on my sister, as expected. I could feel their eyes being drawn to our hairpins and rinsham-washed hair. Of more importance, however, is the fact that the royal present was already familiar with Rozemyne. He knew her name due to her coming first-in-class last year. I could also feel the other archduke candidates taking more interest in her than in my brother."

The other archduke candidates had celebrated Wilfried and Rozemyne's engagement, but Charlotte could not help feeling that few actually meant their words.

"I suppose it is only natural that she would receive such attention," Charlotte mused. "To think she gave a hairpin to every single female student... I could hardly believe it."

The fact that Rozemyne was able to purchase so many personalized accessories with her own money was phenomenal. Charlotte considered herself capable enough to pick hairpins that would complement the girls' hair colors, but being able to afford them within a tightly allotted budget was a different beast entirely.

"I would have liked for her to speak to you about this, Lady Charlotte, as she has done with the printing industry," Marianne said with a distinctly dissatisfied tone. "If she had sought your assistance, you could have divided the cost equally. It would have given everyone the impression that you are contributing to the trends."

Charlotte narrowed her indigo eyes into a harsh glare. "Marianne, Rozemyne thought of these trends herself and spread them on her own.

Were you not displeased when Oswald asked us to credit Wilfried for our own accomplishments? How could we ask Rozemyne to do the same for us?"

"My apologies. I am aware that the aub advised Lord Wilfried in the spreading of trends, so I was just feeling a little vexed."

"I must admit, I share your frustrations," Charlotte replied, feeling somewhat bitter herself. "I understand the importance of propping up Wilfried now that his engagement has secured his ascension, but... I feel sad. Father is already treating me as someone who will inevitably be leaving Ehrenfest," she said, slumping her shoulders.

Vanessa stroked Charlotte's shoulder. "Over half a year has passed since the engagement was announced, but there are still many loud voices calling for Lady Rozemyne to become the next aub. I imagine Aub Ehrenfest is desperate to improve Lord Wilfried's reputation and restrain the Leisegangs in any way he can." She paused for a moment in thought. "Hm... If you are that displeased, perhaps you could add some particularly sharp words to your report? I am certain the aub will be thrown into a panic and apologize at once," she joked.

Charlotte considered that explanation extremely likely. It came as no surprise that Sylvester was focused on making Wilfried seem less mediocre in comparison to Rozemyne; he just hadn't realized how that was making Charlotte feel.

Father has always been dense when it comes to the thoughts and feelings of others... Charlotte thought. Sylvester tended to assume that when he believed in a cause, others would do the same as a matter of course.

"Lady Charlotte, what shall we write?" Marianne asked. "Should we fill the boards with unhappy complaints, or shall we speak of the cooking? Perhaps we should mention how the other duchies responded to the hairpins and rinsham."

"Oh, Marianne..." Charlotte said with a giggle, feeling her mood brighten in an instant. "Father and Mother attended the Archduke Conference—they must already know about the inferiority of Sovereign food, and Mother would have seen how other duchies reacted to our hairpins and rinsham. There is no need for me to report my dissatisfaction either. Let us discuss the third prince, as is most natural."

"I believe Lord Wilfried and Lady Rozemyne will be sending identical

reports on the matter," Marianne replied.

"I recognize that they will understand the nuances of the archduke candidates from other duchies better than I, but Father wished to hear our distinct opinions on matters," Charlotte said, disappointed that she had no exclusive information to report. "I would like to send Mother a separate letter, wherein I consult her on how to deal with certain social situations."

"What manner of questions do you wish to ask?" Marianne probed. "Is our knowledge unsatisfactory?"

Charlotte had memorized the political circumstances she learned from her retainers and greeted the representatives from other duchies, making sure to smile at the other first-year archduke candidates to facilitate their socializing during lessons. She was helped greatly by tips from her older brother and sister, and she hoped to use her unique position as a first-year to gather information that they did not know.

"Not in the least. You have all gathered valuable intelligence for me," Charlotte replied. "I do not consider the fellowship gathering to have been a failure. It's just... Embarrassingly enough, I found myself a little uncomfortable around Lady Detlinde, who so closely resembles Grandmother."

Charlotte had first seen Detlinde during the weddings held at the border gate. She had seemed quite friendly with Wilfried, but she had given only the barest of greetings to so many others, which reminded Charlotte of the way her grandmother Veronica behaved. It was perhaps due to this association that Charlotte's entire body had tensed up upon meeting Detlinde, despite the friendly smile she was received with.

"I know that I must learn from my sister's universal compassion and treat Lady Detlinde as an individual, and I know that she is not my grandmother," Charlotte continued. "But even so, the feelings remain..."

"Please do consult Lady Florencia, then. She spent many long years with Lady Veronica. She will know what to do," Vanessa said, stroking her lady's back once again. She knew how Veronica had treated Florencia and Charlotte all too well.

Charlotte nodded to Vanessa, and as they wrote the report, an ordonnanz flew into the room. "See? Lord Ignaz has sent a message of encouragement," Marianne said as the white bird landed on her arm.

As expected, the ordonnanz was from Ignaz, Wilfried's apprentice

scholar. He was asking who would be compiling and sending the reports; it seemed that both he and Rozemyne's apprentice scholar Hartmut had already finished theirs.

"I shall gather and send them," Marianne said. "Give me just a moment to retrieve them." She sent the ordonnanz off and momentarily exited the room. It had become her regular job to meet the two boys at the landing of the stairs to retrieve their reports.

Charlotte and the others were not yet used to writing reports, so they ended up finishing last.

"My apologies for the wait, Lady Charlotte," Marianne said. She had returned with several more boards than usual today.

"What did my brother and sister speak about in their reports?" Charlotte asked.

"The third prince, as expected." Marianne proffered Charlotte the boards so that she could see what was written on them.

"It was decided that the third prince would stay in the Royal Academy before his debut at the Archduke Conference. He was baptized just recently in the autumn."

"The third prince is the son of the king's third wife, from Dunkelfelger. He was raised to be a vassal to the king's successor, and due to his young age, he seems to have very little experience socializing with others."

Such were the reports from Ignaz and Hartmut, respectively. Despite both being about the third prince, the latter was far more detailed. Charlotte and Marianne had written only as much as Ignaz, so they and all of Charlotte's other retainers bunched together to examine Hartmut's report with widened eyes.

"Where in the world did Hartmut learn this?" Marianne asked.

"I am told that Lady Rozemyne's socializing is quite intense. I would assume it is only natural for someone socializing with top-ranking duchies to have easier access to such information," Kathrein replied.

"But those serving Lord Wilfried also socialize with top-ranking duchies. To my understanding, he spent much time with Lord Ortwin of Drewanchel. Perhaps it comes down to their apprentice scholars—namely their talent for obtaining information from other duchies," Natalie suggested.

As one could guess from Charlotte's balking retainers, comparing the

reports of two apprentice scholars was enough to determine the standing and skill of those they served. Rozemyne had created trends on her own, spread them with her retainers, and managed to develop a social relationship with royalty and top-ranking duchies that Ehrenfest had otherwise lacked.

Rozemyne's success was so great, in fact, that several duchies had actively negotiated trade agreements with Ehrenfest during the Archduke Conference. Goosebumps formed on Charlotte's skin as she realized just how much she paled in comparison to her sister.

"My sister formed connections so well as a first-year, even though she had just awoken from a two-year slumber and spent a crucial period of socializing back in Ehrenfest helping with the Dedication Ritual..." Charlotte whispered to herself.

It was easy to forget with how much Sylvester, Florencia, and the others had asked Charlotte to provide her assistance, but Rozemyne's unusual socializing methods were really quite effective.

"I am unlikely to encounter any problems while socializing here in the Academy, but that is because my brother and sister have already paved the way for me," Charlotte continued. "We must take care not to mistake that for our own accomplishment. We could never have associated with royalty without their assistance. Of course, I will still strive to do my best, such that Rozemyne does not feel ashamed to introduce me as her sister."

Charlotte's retainers all turned their attention back to their lady. "We will take care to not grow arrogant," one noted. "Please keep in mind, however, that we are not yet experienced enough to meet with royalty on a whim. If you intend to socialize with them, let us know ahead of time so that we might lay the necessary groundwork."

Charlotte nodded at her retainers and praised them in her mind. Socializing between nobles was possible only due to the valiant efforts of those who served them.

"To prove I am worthy of the faith and service that you all show me, I must strive to stand proudly beside my older brother and sister. To this end, I suppose I must ensure that every single first-year passes their exams on the first day..."

Charlotte looked at the piles of textbooks she had received from Rozemyne and gave a heavy sigh; having such a daunting task as her first

duty seemed unreasonable, to say the least. Rozemyne stacking the books was eerily similar to Ferdinand stacking boards one after another and saying, “Surely you can handle this much.” They both had a tendency to assign work that pushed the recipient just a bit further than their perceived limit.

Like teacher, like student...

“Once we finish our report, I must begin my studies,” Charlotte declared, trying to pump herself up. Marianne rested a hand gently on her shoulder.

“Lady Charlotte, you need only do the best you can. The first-years were in a truly miserable state last year after Lady Rozemyne forced such an excessive workload upon them. Please do not try so hard that you repeat her mistake and bring suffering to others.”

The Beginning of Classes

It was the day after the fellowship gathering and classes were due to begin. The students in the Ehrenfest Dormitory had eaten breakfast, making sure to squeeze in a few extra moments of studying whenever they could, and were now preparing for their first lesson.

The victory conditions for the Better Grades Committee were the same as last year: either have everyone in your team pass their classes the fastest or produce the most honor students. The new students balked when they saw their seniors working so hard from the very first day and rushed to open up their textbooks as well. Charlotte was doing her best to lead them, but she had no prior experience with the dormitory, meaning she was one step behind us.

I passed a letter to Rihyarda while keeping a watchful eye on my surroundings. “Deliver this meeting request to Professor Solange while I am attending my morning lessons,” I said. “We will need to register the first-years at the library.”

“Understood, milady.”

I was skimming some notes I had written to help me remember some particularly important details when I noticed Charlotte looking at me with puffed-out cheeks. “You certainly are moving at your leisure, Sister...” she said.

“Of course,” I replied. “I was afforded an entire year to prepare, after all. And while I understand that you and the other first-years are bemoaning what little time you had to make your own preparations, I think you are forgetting that you spent this winter and the last studying history and geography in the playroom, and that you have generously been given my textbooks. Last year, the Better Grades Committee wasn’t established until after our arrival at the Royal Academy, so the first-years were forced to adapt almost overnight. You have it much easier than we did.”

The laynoble and mednoble second-years nodded, having struggled a great deal with history and geography at the time. They had looked like

death itself, but this year they looked healthy and fine as they prepared for class. Incidentally, my target for the second-years was for everyone to pass in one go and with the highest possible marks.

“It’s about time,” Rihyarda announced. “Everyone, move to the entrance hall.”

Everyone put away their study materials and gathered in the entrance hall with confident yet also somewhat anxious expressions. We needed to be ready in time for second-and-a-half bell, when our morning classes began. After checking that the first-years were wearing their brooches and capes, we told them what to be aware of and then exited the dormitory.

First- and second-years went to the central building while third-years and above went to the buildings for their respective courses. These first-years were going to have practical lessons in the morning and then written lessons in the afternoon, while we second-years were going to have written lessons in the morning and practical lessons in the afternoon, much like the year before. This morning we were focusing on history and law.

“This will be your first practical lesson, then,” I said to Charlotte. “I hope you are able to wield mana without issue.”

“Indeed,” Charlotte replied. “You and Wilfried are aiming for everyone to pass their written lessons on the first day, correct? I look forward to hearing reports on your success.”

I gave a firm nod in response and then headed to the auditorium with the other second-years. “You must not leave until we come to get you,” our retainers stressed before going on their way. Once they were gone, we looked for the seats designated for Ehrenfest—that is, the ones labeled “ten.” Distinguishing them was very easy indeed, since the desks and chairs were separated into duchies.

“Lady Rozemyne. Lord Wilfried. How do you do?” came a familiar young and gentle voice as students from the other duchies started to gather. It was Hannelore. I turned around and saw that she was standing in front of the other blue-caped Dunkelfelger students. Rather than her guiding them, it seemed more like they were her stalwart defenders.

“Good, Lady Hannelore,” I replied. “I trust you are just as well.”

“Are you and the other Ehrenfest students once again aiming to pass all of your classes on the first day?” she asked with a soft smile, as if she found the sight of us desperately reading our notes heartwarming. “It was quite a

surprise when you accomplished it last year."

Wilfried replied that we hoped to accomplish the same again.

"Much to our embarrassment, during the awards ceremony last year, we were praised for our speed but criticized for our low grades," I admitted with a smile. "Although we still intend to pass on the first day, our goal for this year is to improve our efforts and achieve high grades that we can take pride in."

Hannelore looked at me and the other Ehrenfest students with wide eyes, as did the Dunkelfelger students accompanying her. "I suppose that if anyone can perform such a feat, Lady Rozemyne, it is you," she said. "I look forward to hearing of your duchy's exploits this year."

Lady Hannelore is expecting great things from me?! As a fellow Library Committee member, I need to secure grades that won't disappoint her!

I steeled my resolve to achieve grades befitting of a Library Committee member, at which point my motivation shot up to a level that was entirely unprecedented.

"I will strive to meet your expectations, Lady Hannelore," I said. "I shall also pray for Dunkelfelger to find just as much success this year."

"I thank you ever so much, Lady Rozemyne."

After watching the platoon of blue-capes head to their seats, I returned my focus to my notepad of weaknesses. Our first class was history, which was going to be more complex and in-depth than what we had studied the year before. There was a lot to memorize, but most of the information was just building upon things we had already learned, so it wasn't *that* bad. First- and second-years were taught the general flow of history, while third-years and above learned about particular figures and their achievements, depending on their course.

"I'm so nervous. I was the only one who barely passed history last year..." Philine muttered while preparing her writing utensils, no doubt remembering what the teacher had said to her last year.

"You've got nothing to worry about," I tried to reassure her. "You studied as well as anyone. Isn't that right, Wilfried?"

"Don't talk to me right now, Rozemyne. Feels like the names of all these kings are going to spill out of my ears at any moment."

"They certainly are long and similar-sounding..." I agreed.

The years in this world weren't numbered; instead, Yurgenschmidt

history was neatly delineated into eras based on the reigns of different kings, with the King X era being followed by the King Y era, for example. As I continued memorizing them all, it occurred to me that the system was quite similar to how periods were represented in Japanese history. The names were harder to memorize, but not having to remember numbers made up for that. You just needed to get the general flow down.

"Now, one student from each duchy come forth to fetch the exam papers."

Philine collected the papers as our representative and then handed them out. This was always the most exhilarating moment of school, in my opinion. It made me feel like a hero of legend, brandishing my sword and preparing to fight any valiant foe who would dare challenge me.

Although, when I'm not so confident about passing, it feels more like I'm pleading for my life.

This was a test I *was* confident about, so I finished it in the blink of an eye. It seemed that everyone else from Ehrenfest found it equally trivial. Philine and Roderick in particular looked a lot more at ease than they had the year before.

"Done," Philine eventually announced after staring down at her test with a deadly serious expression. She was the last Ehrenfest student to finish, so we turned in our papers and started studying for our next exam while the professor graded us.

It was while we were studying law that an announcement echoed through the auditorium: "All passing grades for Ehrenfest." We glanced up from our notes and exchanged celebratory looks; the girls smiled at one another while the boys traded more self-assured grins.

Some other duchies received a one hundred percent pass rate as well, but Ehrenfest came in first. Hopefully we could keep it up and pass our next one together too.

Now on to law!

History hadn't been a walk in the park for me, but law was another story entirely. Here, memorizing the content wasn't enough; one needed to understand it as well.

Laws applied to all nobles in Yurgenschmidt, including royalty, and were recorded in what was appropriately titled *The Book of Laws*. We were studying from transcribed copies, while the original was a magic tool in the

Sovereignty. The laws were focused almost entirely on interactions between duchies and things that applied on a countrywide scale, such as the appropriate process for marrying into another duchy or how successors were decided upon. One thing that stood out to me was how detailed the instructions were for when an archduke passed away without settling on a successor.

On the whole, the country's laws were pretty ambiguous and crudely written; a lot of sections said nothing more than "the king will arbitrate" or "a decision shall be made during the Archduke Conference." There had been more than enough times when I wanted to cry out that the laws provided no real guidance—that there was no purpose in them even existing. Did anyone here even understand the point of having them?

According to Ferdinand, it was exceedingly difficult to expunge outdated rules once they were added to *The Book of Law*s. Many were kept vague on purpose as a way to future-proof them.

In the past, there was a king who took issue with how many incidents depended on his arbitration. He introduced one detailed law after another to reduce how often he was consulted on legal matters, which worked well for his time, but as future generations came and went and the country became more modern, these laws became outdated. Still, the people had to follow them.

The king of a new generation had wanted nothing more than to eradicate the laws, but there were many nobles who wanted to keep them as a matter of tradition. Thus began an unending dispute. Decades passed in this state, and every spat among duchies resulted in calls to nullify what some considered to be archaic laws. It wasn't long before the yearly Archduke Conference descended into a state of what could only be called utter chaos.

In the end, it was collectively agreed that the laws were best kept ambiguous. Any excessively detailed rules were removed, and individual problems were instead dealt with through discussion. Ever since then, those who called for more detailed laws were mocked as having been "charmed by the Goddess of Chaos."

I had wondered why the rules went unchanged during such a prolonged period of chaos—surely it was better to change them if discord was expected to continue either way—but rewriting laws was more complicated than I realized. As it turned out, the process took an exceedingly long time,

and it was a lot of work for the king to determine which sections to keep and to remove.

And after so much debate, what they ended up with were these unclear as heck laws...

During a conversation with Ferdinand, I had muttered that having such vague laws only made the resolving of disputes a more drawn-out process. In response, he had muttered that having less restrictive rules was more convenient for those in power. It was a fair point indeed.

It was hard to understand why the laws existed at all, but their ambiguity at least made them easier to remember. I just needed to memorize universal rules which would absolutely never change, rules that allowed for some leeway depending on the king's judgment, rules that were decided in discussions between archdukes, and rules that archdukes could decide on their own.

Compared to all the library and patent laws I had to learn in college back in my Urano days, however, this is a piece of cake.

Everyone turned in their papers, and we began studying for tomorrow's classes. As we waited to receive our grades, I noticed that the professors had started arguing at the front. One of the proctors, Fraularm, was calling it suspicious that we had all finished so quickly and with such high scores, while the other professors chastised her, saying there was nothing suspicious about it at all.

Despite us having turned in our papers first, the second and third duchies to finish received their passing grades before us, while we were made to wait. The tension must have started getting to the others; Philine couldn't help but let out a quiet whimper.

"Lady Rozemyne... Lord Wilfried..."

"We're going to be fine, Philine," Wilfried said. "We know for a fact that we haven't cheated. Hold your head high and be patient."

"You and the others worked hard for an entire year; it's only natural that you'd achieve high grades," I added. And no sooner had the words left my mouth than a voice rang through the auditorium: "All passing grades for Ehrenfest."

It had taken the professors some time to reach an agreement, but we had all passed—and we could tell from Fraularm's shrieks that we had done so with aplomb. Our actual grades were usually kept from us, so it was nice to

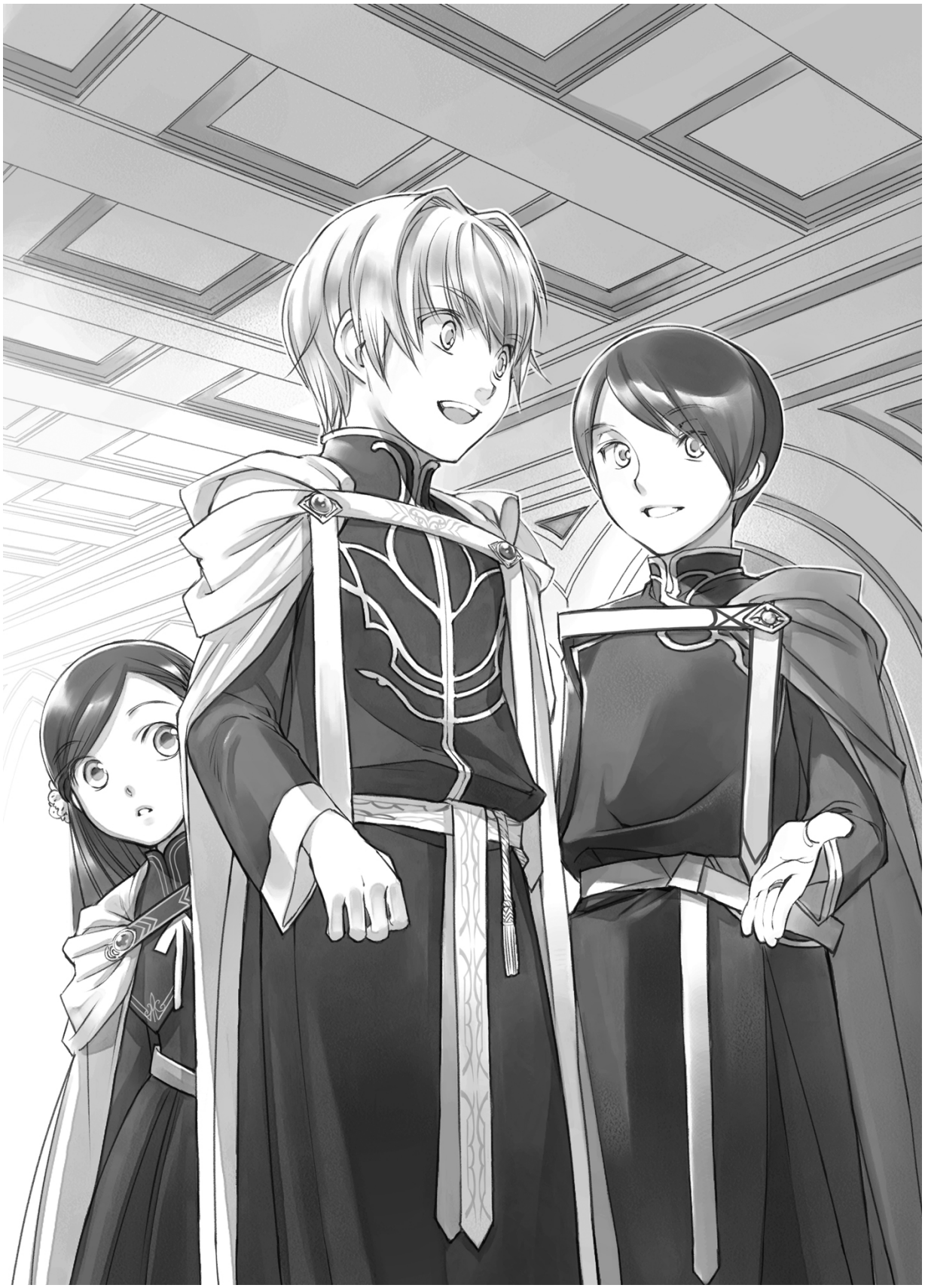
know that we had all done so well.

We put away our things and rose from our seats, ready to return to the dormitory. Before we could, however, a group of emerald-green-caped students from Drewanchel stepped in front of us.

“Seems like you guys are having another good year, Wilfried.”

“Ortwin! I appreciate the compliment, but I could say the same about Drewanchel.”

I took a step back and watched as Wilfried and Ortwin nobly extolled each other’s victories. Everyone in Ortwin’s group looked pretty smart, but maybe that was just because I knew Drewanchel was a duchy known for producing highly skilled scholars in droves.



“Drewanchel has taken first place in overall grades for about twenty consecutive years,” Ortwin said with a confident grin. “Your grades might be getting better, Ehrenfest, but we won’t lose that easily.”

Ooh. They don’t just look smart; they actually are *smart*, I thought. I was pretty sure that the only way to maintain top overall grades was for the duchy’s students to unite as one and all study together.

“Lord Ortwin, we really must be going now,” one of the green-capes said.

“Ah. Indeed. Wilfried, let’s both keep up the good work,” Ortwin said, snapping back to reality. He flourished his emerald-green cape and then exited the auditorium, taking the Drewanchel crowd with him.

“It’s nice having a rival to compete against,” Wilfried said with a contented grin as he watched them go. He then swung his ocher cape in a similar flourish and followed them out.

We headed back to the dormitory for lunch to find that a section of the older apprentice knights and apprentice scholars had already returned. It seemed that the years with written lessons had all successfully passed on their first day.

“Written lessons certainly were easy this year.”

“Indeed. Our victory over the knights is all but guaranteed.”

I was overjoyed to hear that as a member of the Better Grades Committee. I had to admit, it was impressive just how competitive people were when it came to our team-based contest.

“I have delivered your letter to Professor Solange, milady. She was surprised to receive it; this is the first time someone has ever requested a meeting on the same day that classes begin. We may go and register the first-years at noon the day after tomorrow.”

“Can we use that time to change Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes, I wonder?” As far as I was concerned, the sooner we could dress them in their new outfits, the better.

Rihyarda fell into thought for a moment. “We must inform Professor Hirschur of when we will be changing their clothes,” she said, “and Professor Solange is going to be busy registering the first-years. Not to mention, I do not believe you will have enough time to do all of this during your noon break. I would recommend that you focus on registering the first-years and supplying the tools with mana for now. You can change their

clothes when everyone has more time in their schedules."

She had a point. There was no need for me to rush changing their clothes, so I decided to settle for supplying them with mana for the time being.

After an enthusiastic lunch spent chatting about our test results, we saw off Charlotte and the other first-years, calling out words of encouragement as they went to do their exams. We then headed out ourselves, ready to attend our practical lessons. These were held in different classrooms depending on status, so my group dropped in number dramatically.

"Hey everyone," Wilfried said with a smile as he greeted the archduke candidates and archnobles from other duchies. He was rejoicing over their reunion and enthusiastic about their spending another school period together, which made me realize just how behind I was when it came to socializing. I had finished all of my classes in one go, only showing up a single time, so I couldn't remember their names or faces. In truth, they probably didn't remember me either.

I know I should probably socialize more, but... If my choice is between that and the library...

Once again, I was forbidden from entering the library until after I passed my classes, but that was temporary. If you asked me to choose between the library and socializing with other students, I would pick the library every time.

I'm the bookworm who reads in the library, while Wilfried is the popular guy with lots of friends. It's the perfect way to divide our duties, if you ask me. We're both playing to our strengths.

Not to mention, it wasn't as though I had avoided socializing entirely. I had a wonderful friend named Hannelore. My most important duty was deepening my bond with her and making more bookworm friends.

I made one bookworm friend in my first year, so hopefully I can make two bookworm friends in my second.

As I was plotting out how to make more friends this year, four professors entered the room: Hirschur, Fraularm, Primevere, and Rauffen.

"Today, we are going to be reviewing topics covered in your first year, such as handling highbeasts, transforming schtappes, and casting rott," Hirschur announced. "One cannot properly learn new techniques without

first mastering the old."

"Now then, take out your highbeasts," Fraularm called.

We all did as we were instructed, and the Small Hall became twice as cramped in an instant. The speed at which students produced their highbeasts indicated how much practice they had. Some produced theirs instantly, while others needed a little more time to properly form the shape.

Lessy still stood out a little, but there were several other girls who now had similar-looking drivable highbeasts. They wasted no time climbing inside. Of the drivable highbeasts, most were shumils, likely because that was what Hirschur had produced during her initial demonstration, and they all used reins instead of steering wheels.

"Finished," Hannelore said with a short exhale. Her highbeast was a drivable shumil too. It was fairly small, since it was sized to accommodate just her, and its face was very cute. No doubt she loved shumils to death.

Lady Hannelore would probably get along with Lieseleta...

They were both passionate about shumils, and they both looked perfect wearing cute accessories. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that Lady Hannelore had a talent for embroidery and sewing.

Once the professors had confirmed that everyone had made their highbeasts, they moved on to having us morph our schtappes. Rauffen stood in front while the other professors stayed back and kept a close eye on us.

"Alright, take out your schtappes!" he called. His booming voice echoed throughout the Small Hall, and everyone promptly did as they were told.

Holy cow! Talk about a lot of crests!

I had assumed that only Wilfried made a crest-decorated schtappe to gush about, but it seemed they were in fashion among the boys. Some had the crests stuck onto their wand-shaped schtappes like stickers, while others like Wilfried had them physically engraved.

"Why so surprised, Rozemyne?" Wilfried asked. "You look like you've seen something funny."

"I simply did not expect schtappes with crests to be so popular," I replied.

"Actually, I'm the one who started the trend," Wilfried noted as he proudly waved his lion-hilted schtappe. "Makes sense that you don't know, considering how fast you finished your classes."

I had kind of guessed that Wilfried would start a trend of sorts with his

over-the-top schtappe, but I had never expected his influence to be this great.

"Not many girls seem to have crests," I observed.

"Yeah. Some wanted them, but Lady Hannelore said it wasn't a wise idea. You can't really blame her. We're all archduke candidates and archnobles, so most of the girls here are going to be marrying out of their duchies."

Hmm... They could always use subtler and more personal symbols instead.

Back in Japan, there had been maternal symbols passed down from mother to daughter even when they wed into other families and had their last name changed. I was sure that girls here could use such symbols on their schtappes so long as they made it clear they were a maternal tradition or some such.

Not that I really care. I have no intention of using one myself.

Perhaps I could advise Charlotte on maternal symbols so that she could teach the concept to any first-year girls who wanted a crest on their schtappe.

"Once you have formed your schtappes, practice morphing them," Rauffen continued. "If you can't do this, you can't brew. *Messer*!"

Everyone repeated the chant to morph their schtappes and then said "rucken" to revert them back to their original shapes. We then said "stylo" to make a pen and "beimen" to make a mixing stick. This process took some longer than others, but we all managed it successfully.

"Alright. Last step—the emergency signal. *Rott*!" Rauffen shouted.

Everyone fired red lights out of their schtappes at his command. I could understand the necessity of learning to morph one's schtappe early, since it was necessary for brewing practice, but I still found it weird that we were taught "rott" before almost anything else.

Because, I mean, emergency signals aren't something the average person needs that often, right?

I had thought that one could just carry a magic tool with them for shooting out warning signals, but Ferdinand had casually answered that mystery for me with a single line: "Without everyone knowing 'rott,' treasure-stealing ditter would be even more dangerous than it already is."

It was something that I hadn't really considered, since it was only

recently that treasure-stealing ditter had stopped being played, and students now obtained their schtappes during their first year. “Rott” had been much more necessary during the era when one received their schtappes in their third year, after starting a specialized course, and apprentice scholars participated in ditter games alongside the apprentice knights to make and activate magic tools.

I suppose treasure-stealing ditter is just that dangerous...

“Good,” Rauffen said. “Seems like you’ve all been practicing. We can move on to the next step now.” He looked over the gathered students with a smile of satisfaction, at which point Hirschur leisurely walked to the front. She would be taking the lead from here.

“We will now study the fundamentals of brewing. As second-years, you will need to craft rejuvenation potions, ordonnanzes, and feystones for proposing to someone. These will all prove necessary to your lives going forward,” she said.

It seemed that the more specialized practical lessons awaiting us in our third year and beyond required enough mana that we would need potions for each class. We were the ones who would suffer if we didn’t at least learn to make them on our own.

Ordonnanzes were likewise necessary for nobles to speak to one another. Those who only had one would find themselves unable to contact anyone else until they received a response, so it was normal to carry several at all times.

Then there was the engagement feystone. It was necessary for the man and woman who wished to get married to give these stones to one another, and those who were unable to make them simply couldn’t propose at all.

“Our focus for today is simply learning how to make engagement feystones, so you are going to be working with low-quality feystones. These are going to be of no value whatsoever, despite your conceptions of what a proposal feystone should be. When it comes time for you to actually propose, you will want to make one out of the highest quality feystone you can acquire by your own means,” Hirschur said, her smile widening as she spoke. “Some may think it is too early for you all to be learning this, but they are also convenient for forming more casual relationships and requesting escorts for the graduation ceremony. I know of one fine young man who gifted the feystone he made here to his young sweetheart, against

his parents' approval. After all, it was a mere practice feystone, not one for a true proposal."

Oh yeah... I think I remember a scene like that in Royal Academy Love Stories, *which Mother wrote.*

As I recalled the contents of the book, I saw the girls about me listening to the tale of romance with sparkling eyes and clasped hands. It was amusing to see the boys barely reacting in comparison.

Seems like Mother's romance stories know their demographic well. Hello, future customers.

The ingredients that Hirschur had prepared were lined up in front of us, and we were told to collect our own from the gathering spot near our dormitories.

"We will be brewing a rejuvenation potion during our next lesson," Hirschur said. "Take care not to forget your ingredients."

Library Committee Member Get!

The next day's lessons were math, theology, and magecraft. All three were building upon topics we had discussed the year before, and the fact we had studied so far ahead meant they were of no concern. The Ehrenfest second-years seated in the auditorium all seemed bright and sunny.

In math, we were tasked with using a calculator to solve problems involving numbers of many significant figures. I had learned to use calculators exclusively for this exam, although Ferdinand had explicitly instructed me to continue using my stone slate before the test and to use written math to double-check all of my answers. I had also studied things like duchy budget ledgers and tax percentages, but they weren't particularly difficult. The material covered was at a similar level to what children would learn between third and fifth grade in elementary school; anything more advanced was reserved for the scholar course.

"I've learned a lot helping in the temple, so I actually feel really confident with my math," Philine said with a sparkle in her grass-green eyes once the tests were prepared. That seemed to remind Wilfried of something, as he grimaced just a little in response.

"By 'helping in the temple,' do you mean helping Uncle?" he asked.

"Yes, Lord Wilfried. I've gotten much better over the past year."

"Wait... You've been going to the temple, Philine?" Roderick asked, his dark-brown eyes widening in a mixture of disgust and bewilderment. I couldn't help but smile at how predictable his response was; nobles really did look down on the temple.

"I *am* the High Bishop," I said. "It is only natural that Philine would visit the temple as my retainer. Hartmut and my apprentice guard knights do the same by day. You would do well to consider this if you wish to give your name to me."

Even after receiving words of warning from Matthias, Roderick had resolved to give me his name. He was striving to socialize more with my retainers, Philine chief among them, and would sit as close to me as

possible during classes. Perhaps because he had announced his intention to become my name-sworn, my retainers made no attempt to push him away from me. Instead, they watched him with sharp eyes, evaluating his every move.

As expected, we finished the math test without any problems. I had told everyone to double-check their answers by calculating them in reverse, so I doubted there would be many mistakes.

"This was much simpler than helping Lord Ferdinand," Philine said with a small smile. "I was not scolded for my mistakes, nor was I made to redo any of my work."

On her first day spent helping in the temple, Philine had struggled with math since she wasn't used to it and wilted from her anxiety. "Your math is wrong. Start over," Ferdinand would say, and she would mercilessly be made to redo her work again and again. But all these mistakes and the experience she had gained from them had made her far more competent than she once was, and she now understood that the emotionless looks she had received from Ferdinand were certainly not ones of anger.

"Theology next, huh?" Wilfried muttered.

Our first task was to learn the name of the primary god of whatever season we were born in, alongside their subordinate gods. We then picked another primary god and their subordinates, alongside what they governed. It was probably a nightmare for those who were completely unfamiliar with the names of the gods, but my karuta and picture-book bibles meant that all the Ehrenfest second-years were more than prepared. This test was another easy win.

"Rozemyne, which will you be writing about?" Wilfried asked.

Those who had only one elemental affinity could pick any primary god and their subordinates, but those with multiple had to pick from the ones they had. This was because it was important to learn about the gods whose divine protection you were best able to call upon, which would be relevant in our third-year lessons. Since I was born in the summer, I needed to memorize the names of Leidenschaft the God of Fire and his subordinates by default, then I needed to pick one other. I had all affinities, so I could pick anyone I wanted.

My choice here is obvious. There's only one god I really want the divine protection of...

“I plan to choose Wind and her subordinates, as she deals so intimately with libraries and books,” I replied. “The god I wish to offer the most prayers to is without a doubt Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom.”

“That’s pretty like you. I plan on going with Water, for my birth season, and Fire, to pray for more growth,” Wilfried said. It seemed that he wanted to mature and grow stronger.

“What about you, Philine?” I asked.

“I only have one affinity, which is Earth. For my other one, I’m going to pick Wind—the same as you, Lady Rozemyne. I want Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom’s divine protection as well.”

“It certainly would be nice for scholars to receive divine protection from the Goddess of Wisdom,” I mused. “And you, Roderick?”

Roderick looked around enviously and then shook his head of tawny hair. “I was born under Wind, and my only other affinity is Earth, so I have no choice in the matter.”

“I envy you, Roderick,” Philine said with a vexed sigh. “Having the affinity will make it easier for you to get protection, even if you don’t get to choose what to learn about.”

Roderick blinked a few times and then muttered, “Right,” as though he were seeing his situation from a whole new perspective. It seemed that he had been so jealous about everyone else getting to pick that he hadn’t realized the problems his classmates were facing.

“All passing grades for Ehrenfest,” came the professor’s call.

Much like our other subjects, theology was completed without incident. I ended up feeling nostalgic for the days when I first entered the temple as an apprentice shrine maiden and was brought to tears by the unbelievably long names of the gods that I was made to remember.

This year’s magecraft lessons were about the basics of magic circles, and thanks to everything Ferdinand had already taught me, I had no issues. I simply needed to remember the symbols and warnings for drawing a magic circle. The warnings were about elements that were dangerous or had unique effects when combined.

I just need to remember that Life will react violently to anything but Earth.

The magic circles we second-years were going to be drawing in our

practical lessons were generally simple ones of a single element. The few more complicated circles used several elements, but only ones that worked well together. Things would get much harder in the scholar course.

After concluding our morning written lessons and passing all of our tests without issue, we moved to our afternoon music practical lesson in the Small Hall. I looked around and saw that the crowd was now thin enough for me to recognize individuals, although I still struggled to remember their names.

“This is the song that you will be playing today,” Professor Pauline said as she smacked some sheet music onto a large board. The sheet music began growing in size until I could see the notes even from far away. “You will also need to perform one other song that you are particularly familiar with.”

During our first year, when our practical classes first began, everyone had stuck with the others from their duchies, as they would during their written lessons. Soon after I passed my tests, however, the students had all started to socialize and get to know one another; they were now mingling with one another regardless of duchy.

Once the professor had given us our work, a quick look around revealed that everyone was practicing with the friends they had made the year before. Wilfried picked up his harspiel and headed straight for a growing throng of boys, among which was Ortwin, while Hannelore went to speak with a large group of girls.

What should I do...?

It would be easy to pick up my harspiel and head over to Hannelore’s group, who would most likely welcome me, but there was a chance they would want us all to practice and pass together. That would make it harder for me to pass in one go and then immediately stop attending, and since my aim was to unlock the library as soon as possible, I decided I was better off playing on my own.

It’s a little upsetting that everyone is going to view me as a loner, but I’ll do what I must.

The song we were required to play was one that Ferdinand had gotten me to learn about half a year ago, so after just a little practice to refresh my memory, I was confident that I could pass. As for the one that was my own choice, any of the songs I had learned around the same time would be

sufficiently complex and well-known without boosting my reputation.

While everyone else chatted and practiced, I swiftly warmed up and then approached the teacher. I wanted this over and done with as soon as possible. I didn't even want to think about how sad I would look if she made me return to practicing alone.

"Professor Pauline, may I perform the songs?" I asked. She was the professor who had invited me to a tea party last year. She had started playing her own harspiel after giving us our work, but she stopped to blink at me in surprise.

"Oh my, Lady Rozemyne. Are you truly ready to play so soon?"

"I am. The test song is one that I have already studied," I said, taking the seat offered to me and readying my harspiel. I could feel the eyes of the others falling on me against my wishes, perhaps because I was the first person taking the test. The buzz that had filled the Small Hall quieted in an instant.

Taken aback by the sudden attention, I took a few deep breaths to calm myself and then strummed the strings of my harspiel. High notes from my right hand and low notes from my left danced through the air.

"Very good," Pauline said when I was finished. I had passed with ease thanks to having continued my daily practice in the temple and the castle. "You have grown much over the past year," she continued, but despite her praise, she was looking at me with narrowed and dissatisfied eyes. "I must say, though—your choice of song was quite uninspired. I had been hoping that you would play one of your new songs, Lady Rozemyne... Do you simply not have any more?"

There were plenty more original songs that I had made at Rosina's request, but I had no intention of drawing any more attention to myself. Had it not been for Wilfried spilling the beans last year, nobody would have known about them in the first place. Debuting another one of my own compositions here would only make me even more of a laughingstock, turning me from a loner into a loner who was trying much too hard to impress everyone. Instead, I wanted to finish class as soon as possible and disappear. If anything, my goal was for everyone to forget about me entirely.

"Unfortunately, I have no songs that I am willing to debut here."

"Then we shall have another tea party this year. I would like to hear your

original music again, Lady Rozemyne. Do bring that musician of yours."

"I am ever so glad that you enjoy my music, Professor Pauline. I, too, am proud of my musician."

Guhhh... Now I have a tea party clogging up my schedule. I can only pray there won't be a royal in attendance this year.

In any case, I had successfully passed; I just needed to kill time somehow until the end of class. I looked at the others and noticed that Wilfried, who usually didn't care too much about instruments, was glaring at his sheet music with his mouth bent into a frown. The groups of girls were chattering even more than before; their hands barely moved at all.

Bleh. If only I had a book, then I wouldn't mind being a loner. A harspiel just doesn't cut it for me.

I had nothing to do but practice music, so I returned to my seat and started adjusting my harspiel. That was when Hannelore came over, looking rather timid. I blinked at her, and she smiled at me in turn. Maybe she was worried about me being all alone. Just the thought seemed to brighten my entire world.

That's Hannelore for you! My truest friend!

"To think you would pass this quickly..." she said. "You must have a talent for the harspiel as well, Lady Rozemyne."

"Oh, no. I simply have a strict instructor. I would rather spend my time reading books than practicing the harspiel, but for some reason, things never seem to work out that way."

If not for Rosina requesting that she be allowed to work as my personal musician and Ferdinand frequently assigning me songs to learn and checking my progress, I would have trashed the harspiel a long time ago to secure more reading time.

"I also need to pass quickly, otherwise I'll miss my opportunity to visit the library before the Dedication Ritual," I continued. "I can't have that. Schwartz and Weiss are waiting for me."

"Are they the large, shumil-shaped magic tools assisting Professor Solange in the library?" Hannelore asked, looking at me quizzically.

I nodded in response. It had seemed pretty obvious to me, but perhaps their names were still unknown to most people.

Hannelore put her hands on her cheeks and let out a dreamy sigh. "Schwartz and Weiss are positively adorable," she said, unable to hide the

sparkle in her red eyes. “Last year, the very sight of them working in the library was enough to soothe my heart.”

All of a sudden, her eyes shot open as though she had snapped back to reality, and she began peering around us with a worried expression. Her light-pink pigtails swayed with each turn, and as I watched their hypnotic movement, I thought back on our conversation. Had I said anything that Hannelore wouldn’t want other people hearing? I was desperate for an opening to invite her to the Library Committee, sure, but I hadn’t actually done it yet.

And I haven’t made any of the mistakes I used to make back on Earth, right? I didn’t forget to zip my trousers up, and there aren’t any price tags on my clothes...

My attendants had taken great care in dressing me, as they always did, so I couldn’t imagine there was anything wrong with my clothes that someone might notice. I reached up to feel my head; my hairpin hadn’t fallen out either.

Hannelore stepped forward, still eyeing the crowd around us. I swallowed hard and waited to hear what she would say next.

“U-Um, Lady Rozemyne...” she eventually said, keeping her voice low. “I’ve been meaning to apologize to you for quite some time now.”

“Aside from my abrupt collapse at the tea party, I can’t think of anything that you might feel the need to apologize for,” I replied, unsure what she was referring to.

Hannelore shook her head. “Not for something I did, but for Dunkelfelger,” she whispered. Her voice was so hushed that it was almost inaudible above the strums of the practicing students, but she explained the circumstances behind Lestilaut demanding ownership of Schwartz and Weiss last year. “When I saw how cute they were, I whispered that I wished to be their master instead. I now know that Lestilaut troubled both you and Ehrenfest as a result. By the time I was made aware, the prince had already become involved, which truly surprised me.”

To summarize, upon hearing his cute little sister whisper her dream to be lord of the shumils, Lestilaut had started on his epic quest to steal Schwartz and Weiss from me.

What a pain in the neck! Show your brotherly affection some other way, man!

“On top of that, I am told that Professor Rauffen has been incessantly challenging Ehrenfest to games of ditter,” Hannelore continued. “I am trying to stop him, but I fear he will continue to pester you. I-I am ever so worried you might begin to hate me, Lady Rozemyne...” There were tears in her eyes, and she started to apologize for not having apologized to me sooner.

Ah! My heart! Lady Hannelore is lethally cute! I should have known that my fellow bookworm friend would want to own Schwartz and Weiss too! This is my only opportunity to invite her to the Library Committee. It’s do-or-die time!

“I could not fathom a reason to hate you, Lady Hannelore,” I said, looking up at her from my seat. “You said that you wish to be Schwartz and Weiss’s master, correct? In that case, you may join me in the Library Committee.”

Hannelore tilted her head in confusion. “Erm, what is the Library Committee?”

“A group that assists Professor Solange and provides Schwartz and Weiss with mana. You love books too, do you not? We would love to have you.”

Hannelore received my straightforward request with wide eyes and then rested a contemplative hand on her cheek. “It certainly does sound enjoyable to spend time in the library with Schwartz and Weiss,” she said with a smile.

Heck yes! Library Committee member get!

I had been wondering when I would get an opportunity to invite Hannelore into the Library Committee, and fate had dropped her right into my lap. I suppressed my urge to leap into the air and strike a celebratory pose, which would no doubt become a prayer to the gods, and instead just clenched my fists victoriously.

“Um, Lady Rozemyne,” Hannelore said. “I, *ahem*, do have one shameful request...”

“Yes?” I replied. She was a fellow Library Committee member now; I was ready and willing to grant whatever her wish might be.

“I would, um, like to have my personal musician play the song that you are said to have composed,” she muttered, fidgeting all the while. “Would you permit this?”

It seemed that Pauline had performed my original song during music class last year, and Hannelore wanted her musician to learn it. Her request was for me to teach them Rosina's songs as I had taught the music professors during our tea party. Hannelore's musician playing my song would serve as proof of our deep friendship, so I nodded with a smile.

"Shall I teach them at the planned tea party for sharing books?" I asked. "We can each bring our musician."

"I thank you ever so much, Lady Rozemyne. I look forward to the next time we trade books," Hannelore replied.

Working in the library with Lady Hannelore... Having tea parties with Lady Hannelore... Trading books with Lady Hannelore... I'm... I'm not alone anymore!

Once our lesson was over, I exited the Small Hall to warm dreams of my promise made with a true friend. Rihyarda was waiting outside with my retainers, and Cornelius gave a small chuckle when he saw the look on my face.

"I suppose you were successful, then?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "I passed music as well."

"I did too, Lady Rozemyne!" Philine reported as she walked up to me with a smile. Her chest was puffed out, and she was so excited that her cheeks had turned rosy. "The professor praised me and said that I have gotten much better since last year. It's all thanks to you practicing with me."

Philine had been practicing with me at the temple under Rosina's guidance, so she had progressed unusually quickly for a laynoble.

"A new teacher would mean nothing if you did not take your studies seriously. Your skills are the result of your own hard work," I said to Philine. I then turned to my retainers to report on the fruits of my own labor. "After giving me my passing mark, Professor Pauline invited me to a tea party. I also made various meaningful promises with Lady Hannelore. I am a star socialite, am I not?"

My retainers all widened their eyes, shocked to hear that I had prioritized socializing over the library. Of course, this wasn't really the case; my socializing today had come under my duties as a member of the Library Committee. There was no need for me to point that out, though, so I simply remained quiet and smiled.

We easily passed the next day's written lessons as well. There was nothing surprising about that, since we had spent a year studying what students normally learned over a single season. From an outside perspective, however, it was entirely abnormal for every member of a duchy to pass their lessons on the first day—and with such consistency.

Ortwin walked over, making sure to flourish his emerald-green Drewanchel cape. "Wilfried, is Ehrenfest *still* passing everyone on the first day of each subject?" he asked.

"Yep," Wilfried replied. "We're expecting this trend to continue for the rest of our written lessons. We can't afford to lose and miss out."

"Miss out on what...?" Ortwin asked curiously with a noble-like smile. Wilfried seemed to realize then that he had said too much.

"Don't worry about it," he replied. "It's an Ehrenfest secret."

Indeed. We have no plans to bring tarts to the Royal Academy.

Wilfried had replied so evasively because we had no intention of spreading my tart recipe, but to the students of Drewanchel, it must have seemed like we were hiding some grand secret. Their eyes began to gleam to an almost frightening degree.

"A secret in Ehrenfest that's boosting your grades, huh?" Ortwin said. "Don't think you can hide it from me forever. I *will* get to the bottom of this."

"You're welcome to try," Wilfried shot back with a smirk.

Ah... Okay. Have fun, you two.

Registering for the Library and Supplying Mana

During this lunch break, I was visiting the library for the first time in a long while. I was bringing the first-years to be registered, and seeing them lined up in the common room brought a smile to my face.

“It will cost you each one small gold to register in the Royal Academy’s library,” I said. “I am willing to lend money to those who simply cannot afford this cost. You may then settle your debt to me by working hard on transcriptions.”

The common room’s bookcase contained a copy of the book catalog from Ehrenfest and records of the books that senior students had transcribed the year before. I cautioned the first-years to pay extra attention to what we had and what others were already working on, such that we did not end up with unnecessary duplicates, and they responded with eager nods.

I finished my lunch in a hurry and then prepared to leave. After visiting the library, I would need to go straight to my afternoon practical lessons.

“Does this mean you are accompanying them to the library after all, Lady Rozemyne?” Cornelius asked once I was ready. He was giving me a look that made it clear he had seen this coming but still really didn’t want to go.

“Would it not be strange for me to remain in the dorm while students from our duchy are going to get registered?” I asked.

“I implore you to reconsider. You registered last year, Lady Rozemyne, so this matter has absolutely nothing to do with you, and the first-years are already going to have Lady Charlotte with them as an archduke candidate. I think it would only be bothersome of you to bring so many of your retainers to Professor Solange’s office.”

“Perhaps, but I still need to supply Schwartz and Weiss with mana,” I retorted with pursed lips.

Cornelius shrugged. “Professor Solange hasn’t sent word that they’re

running low.”

He wasn’t wrong about that. We had given Solange some feystones packed with mana, so there was no real need for me to visit her today in particular, but I wasn’t going to surrender my one chance to go to the library before I finished my classes.

“Why are you being so spiteful when you know how much this means to me? Hm... Could it be that you were rejected by your sweetheart?” I asked, fixing him with a stern glare.

Cornelius’s eyes shot wide open. “No!” he cried, rejecting the idea instantly.

“Have you chosen someone to escort, then? Both you and Hartmut are sixth-years now,” I said, noting that honor students would naturally be popular with the girls while looking between them.

Upon hearing my words, Cornelius and Hartmut exchanged glances and then nodded at each other. They even went as far as to exchange a firm handshake, one signifying a bond that not even time could break.

Hartmut looked down at me with a smile. “We shall not tell you, Lady Rozemyne.”

“But why?!” I exclaimed, having not expected him to so flatly refuse me.

“Because you would leak everything to Mother, who would then use it as material for her books,” Cornelius replied as he looked over at the bookcase. I couldn’t follow his eyes exactly, but I could guess that he was focusing on the collection of romance stories Elvira and her friends had written: *Royal Academy Love Stories*.

In short, Cornelius was concerned that his personal experiences would be used as fodder for the second or third volume of *Royal Academy Love Stories*, and I could understand why—Elvira had written about Lamprecht and Aurelia’s romance with an excited smile on her face. She had swapped out the names, and the inserted songs extolling the gods made it hard to identify who was who... but those who knew, knew. It was pretty much guaranteed that Cornelius would receive the same treatment.

Incidentally, Lamprecht’s story had turned into one of two lovers ripped apart by social forces, only to end up together when the gods answer their prayers. It had undergone such liberal rewrites that it was mostly fiction by the time Elvira was finished with it; her power of delusion was truly a sight

to behold.

“I understand your wish to not be used as material for a book,” I said, “but you will surely need to greet your partners sooner or later.” This was especially true if said partners were from another duchy, since Cornelius and Hartmut would need to speak to their parents before the Interduchy Tournament. They were just buying a little time before Elvira inevitably found out.

“Fear not—we will take care of that while you are away for the Dedication Ritual,” Hartmut replied casually. Judging by how breezy he and Cornelius seemed, they had probably settled on partners already.

I glanced over at Leonore, who had previously spoken about having feelings for Cornelius. She was looking down at the floor, such that her grape-colored bangs obscured whatever face she was making.

“Why are we even talking about this?” Cornelius sighed. “I simply wanted to prioritize finishing my classes so that I can accompany you on your soon-to-come daily visits.”

“Then you may remain in the dorm,” I said. “I will go with Judithe, Leonore, and Charlotte’s retainers instead.”

Cornelius let out another heavy sigh, shook his head, and then looked at me with careful eyes. “No, I will accompany you,” he said. “I’ve been told not to let you out of my sight when possible.”

I wanted to ask by whom but stopped myself. It was probably Ferdinand. Or Sylvester. Or Florencia, Karstedt, or Elvira... As all these names passed through my mind—and inadvertently out my mouth—Hartmut’s bright orange eyes grew distant.

“Ah,” he said in apparent realization. “I received the same instruction, and from many others as well. There were your temple attendants, Damuel, Angelica, Lord Eckhart, Lord Justus... Then, upon my return to the castle, there was Mother and Lord Bonifatius...”

“Okay,” I said. “I understand your perspectives.” It seemed there were a lot of people who viewed me going to the library as an event requiring much observation.

“In that case, Lady Rozemyne—” Cornelius began.

“However—no matter what others may think, I will never give up on the library. Let us hurry there at once.”

It’s been so long since I was last there. I can’t wait. Woo-hoo!

“There’s no reason to be concerned this time,” Rihyarda said, sounding somewhat defeated as she opened the door. “We have some empty feystones from my boy Ferdinand.”

“Charlotte, put the board we received from Professor Solange through the hole in the door,” I instructed. I could enter the library freely because I was already registered, but the first-years needed Solange’s permission.

“Yes, Sister.”

Charlotte slid the board through what was essentially a mail slot, looking rather tense all the while. The doors creaked open a few moments later.

We started down the brightly lit hallway—the first-years were unable to contain their amazement—and then entered the room at the very end. Solange was waiting inside, much like last year, wearing a peaceful smile. This time, however, Schwartz and Weiss were there with her.

“It’s good to see you again, Professor Solange,” I said.

“I am glad to see you well, Lady Rozemyne,” she replied, her blue eyes crinkling as her smile deepened. She was the very image of a grandmother seeing her granddaughter for the first time in a while. “I see you have grown since last year.”

“H-Huh? Have I really grown so much that you noticed at a single glance?” I asked. My heart was overflowing with joy, but Schwartz and Weiss hopped over before she could answer.

“Milady is here.”

“Welcome, milady.”

“They’re large shumils...” one of the first-years whispered.

“They can talk?” another asked in a hushed voice. It was their first time seeing Schwartz and Weiss, and their surprise was more than apparent.

Charlotte stepped forward as the first-years’ representative. “Sister, are these Schwartz and Weiss?” she asked, her indigo eyes sparkling as she followed their movements with her eyes. “I heard about them before, but they are even more adorable than I imagined.”

“Indeed,” I replied with a smile of my own; I could see Lieseleta watching with a doting expression out of the corner of my eye. “You and the others must not make physical contact with them, though. They are protected by several magic circles meant to prevent them from being stolen.

A simple touch would only result in sparks, but if you continue, things will surely escalate."

It was to be expected that someone would eventually bump into Schwartz and Weiss as they waddled around the library, carrying out their duties—that was why such slight touches would give a light warning in the form of a sharp but very brief pain, like an electric shock. Those who continued to touch them, however, would find the intensity increase more and more. Eventually, the warnings would stop, and the magic circles would start to cause burns and bruises.

"I know. I embroidered the magic circles alongside the others," Charlotte said proudly. "Furthermore, no matter how cute they are, they remain the heirlooms of royalty—that I should never touch them without permission is obvious."

The students just then learning that Schwartz and Weiss were the heirlooms of royalty stared at them with surprised expressions. There were clear looks of awe and submission on their faces.

"I see that you have already spoken to the others about Schwartz and Weiss, Lady Rozemyne, so I will spare them another explanation," Solange said, raising a hand to her lips and giving a refined smile as she looked between Schwartz and me. "Might I ask you to supply Schwartz and Weiss with mana as I register the first-years? They are both quite pleased to see you."

"Of course," I replied. "We shall go to the reading room, such that we are not in your way."

"Very well. If you wish to avoid prying eyes, there is nobody on the second floor at the moment," Solange noted with a bemused smile. It must have been clear on my face that I was just looking for an excuse to visit the reading room, and she was no doubt thinking of the time Dunkelfelger had come to complain. I similarly wanted to avoid any further conflict, so it was crucial that we remain largely unseen.

And so, we headed to the reading room's second floor, as suggested. "I see the first-years getting registered really didn't matter to you at all..." Cornelius remarked as we made our way there, sounding exasperated.

"My duty is to supply Schwartz and Weiss with mana," I replied without even turning around. We entered the reading room with the two shumils in tow, ascended the staircase to our left, and then confirmed that there really

was nobody around. “Cornelius, stand guard at the stairs to ensure that nobody intrudes. Am I right to assume you can manage on your own? Judithe and Leonore will want to see Schwartz and Weiss, I imagine.”

In truth, it was best to have them on guard duty as well, but most girls really loved the two shumils. Judithe and Leonore had also helped with the embroidery, so it seemed much too sad to leave them behind.

Leonore giggled at my suggestion. “There is no need for that, Lady Rozemyne. I, too, will guard the stairs.”

“Are you certain?” I asked.

“Quite. I will perform my duty as a guard today, but please do allow me to join you next time,” she said, a hint of amusement in her indigo eyes. I signaled my understanding with a smile and then continued on my way, leaving her and Cornelius behind.

“We should be hidden from anyone who might climb the stairs here,” Rihyarda noted.

I nodded, extended my hands to the golden feystones on Schwartz’s and Weiss’s heads, and then stroked them gently while pouring in my mana. It seemed that they weren’t too low on mana thanks to the feystones I had given Solange, but their golden eyes were closed as though they were pleased to be stroked, so I prioritized praising them over supplying them with mana.

“Schwartz, Weiss—you have done well working from spring until today.”

“We worked hard.”

“Solange was happy.”

“Things will get even more difficult now that students are gathering for the winter,” I said. “Also, I made a friend who is going to be working with me as a Library Committee member. I will introduce you later.” I removed my hands from Schwartz’s and Weiss’s feystones, at which point they opened their golden eyes, blinked, and then walked farther into the library.

“Milady. Milady.”

“Rub this too.”

“This...?” I repeated, confused.

I followed the shumils to a stone statue between two bookshelves. It was a statue of Mestionora the Goddess of Wisdom, and she was holding the Grutrissheit to her chest. Just as the statues in the temple held actual divine

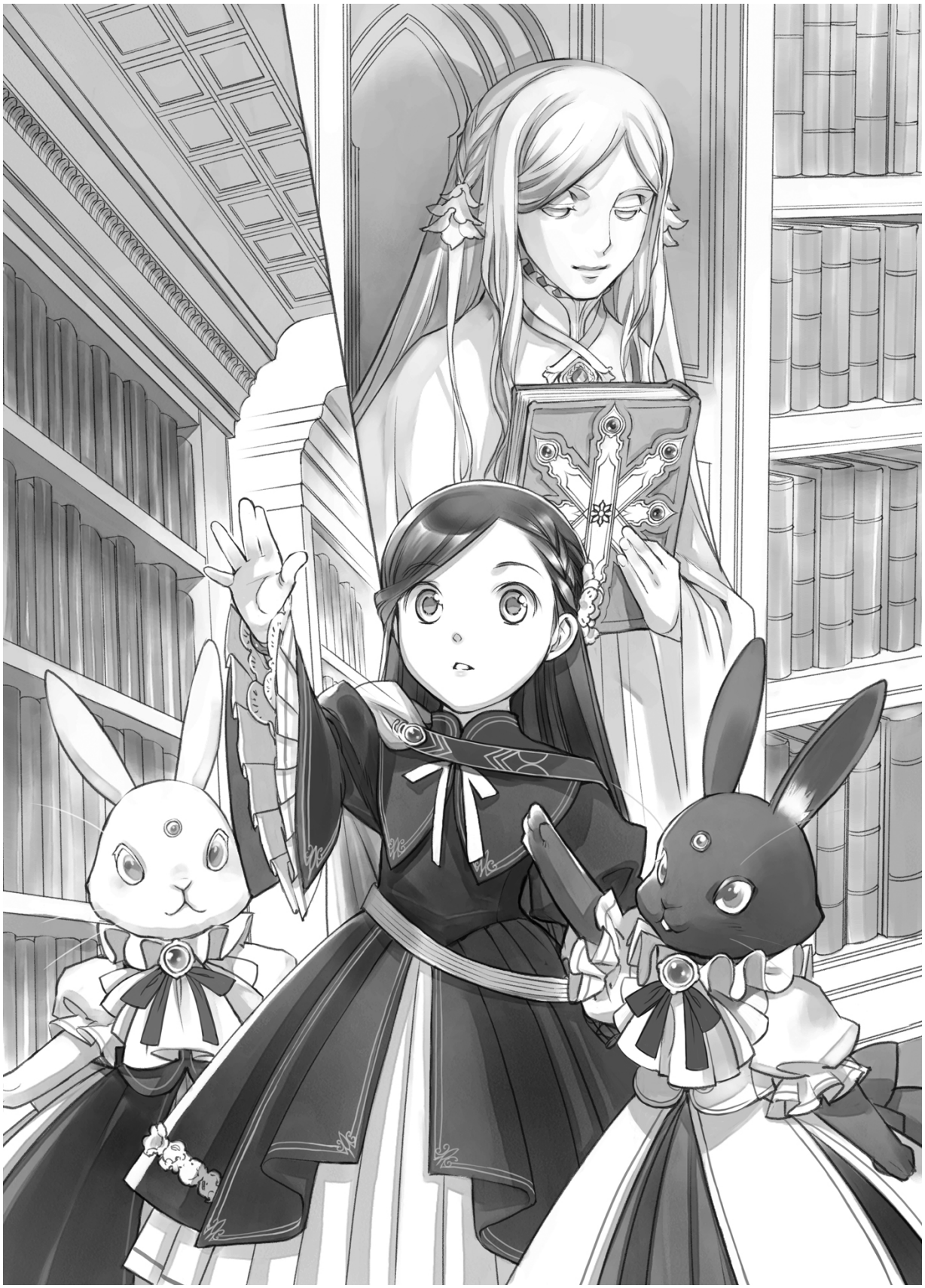
instruments, the pure-white statue of Mestionora was holding a yellow leather-bound book, impressive in size and intricately decorated. The feystones of various colors dotting its cover were enough for me to determine it was a magic tool.

Seeing the statue reminded me of something Solange had once said—that the library having Mestionora's protection would cause more student-transcribed materials to gather here.

"Milady. Rub here."

"Pray here. Your job, milady."

Schwartz and Weiss pointed to the Grutrissheit that Mestionora was holding. I had no objections, so I placed my hand upon it and prayed.



May more books be brought to the library.

As I prayed, I stroked the feystones embedded in the Grutrissheit. I could feel my mana starting to get sucked out... and then a great flood was drained from me all at once—far more than I had given to Schwartz and Weiss. I reflexively pulled my hand away.

“Did something happen, milady?” Rihyarda asked. Her brow was furrowed; perhaps she was concerned about my sudden reaction.

I gazed between my hand and the Grutrissheit, then looked around carefully to see if anything unusual was happening. Something strange usually followed whenever a bunch of my mana was sucked out in one go—even I was able to piece that together.

And yet, nothing happened. The statue depicting Mestionora didn’t move, nor did a door to the royalty’s secret archive miraculously open. In truth, a small part of me had hoped there would be some kind of change, but alas.

Still... This is strange.

“I see nothing’s happening...” I remarked.

“What did you do, Lady Rozemyne?” my retainers asked. Before I could even respond, however, Schwartz and Weiss answered for me.

“Milady’s job.”

“Gramps will be happy.”

“Schwartz, Weiss... Who is this ‘gramps’?” I asked. It was a name I had never heard before, and to my knowledge, they called all of the librarians they served “milady.” But their answers only led to more confusion.

“Gramps is gramps.”

“He is old. Powerful.”

“Considering the title you’ve given him, he must be very old and very high in status...” I ventured, probing for more information. But the response I received was a simple:

“Yes.”

I mean, sure, Schwartz and Weiss are cute... but they’re so hard to understand at times.

No amount of ruminating would answer my questions, so I decided to stop thinking about the matter entirely. I could just ask Solange later, after all. As I reached this conclusion, I heard some clattering and awed exclamations from the first floor; the first-years had most likely been

registered and taken to the reading room.

“Schwartz, Weiss, let us descend to the first floor,” I said. “You may guide the first-years. I have something to discuss with Professor Solange.”

“Understood, milady. We shall guide.”

And so, we headed down to the first floor. Schwartz and Weiss were somewhat limited with their language, so their explanations might not have been the clearest, but Charlotte’s retainers were older students who could handle any questions that came up.

“Professor Solange, there is something I was hoping to discuss,” I said. I went on to suggest that she keep the feystones I had received from Ferdinand with her, since I was once again forbidden from visiting the library until after I passed my classes.

“Please do not overexert yourself, dear...” Solange said.

“Of course. I simply want to finish my classes as soon as possible so that I may properly establish the Library Committee. I very much enjoyed handling returns with Schwartz and Weiss last year.”

“Your assistance then truly was of great help,” Solange replied. We both smiled as we recalled the flood of panicked students, their arms filled with books. “The return rate was so high, I would almost like for Lord Ferdinand to send more ordonnanzes of encouragement this year as well.”

“He will need something in return...” I said. “Perhaps this could be solved if we had a magic tool that could record his voice.”

The existence of magic tools that could record video and magic tools like ordonnanzes that carried voice messages had made me assume that a voice recorder would be commonplace, but apparently not. Solange blinked at me in confusion.

“A tool for recording voices, you say?”

“Indeed. Are you unfamiliar with the idea?”

“It would certainly be convenient to have one. I cannot see it being too useful outside of this one particular use, however, considering that making loud noises is improper here in the library,” she explained. That reminded me—the magic tool that Ferdinand had provided to record the sword dancing and dedication whirling hadn’t captured any audio.

I wonder whether I could ask Ferdinand or Professor Hirschur to make one...

“That matter aside, though—will you be well, Lady Rozemyne?”

Solange asked, her expression clouded. She cared more about the burden of supplying mana than any talk of magic tools that might not even exist. “You will need much mana for your practical lessons; is supplying Schwartz and Weiss with mana not a burden?”

“There is nothing to worry about,” I assured her. “Lady Hannelore will now be working with me as a Library Committee member.”

“Lady Hannelore... Is that not the archduke candidate from Dunkelfelger?” Solange asked, once again looking confused. “I recall that you fought with Dunkelfelger over Schwartz and Weiss.”

I explained that the feud between our duchies was entirely down to Lestilaut acting on his own. “Lady Hannelore is a sweet and kind girl who loves books and shumils,” I concluded. “Assuming there is no problem with her affinities, I even plan to share my position as Schwartz and Weiss’s lady with her.”

“Oh my. In that case, I would like to have another tea party this year, before the students begin to fill the library. There is much I wish to discuss. Please do invite Lady Hannelore, if you can.”

In an instant, I could feel my world get a whole lot brighter. This was a tea party with Solange and Hannelore in the library we were talking about here. Just thinking about it made me want to skip and dance.

“A tea party of bookworms, then,” I said. “I shall contact Lady Hannelore without fail.”

“Oh yes,” Solange replied. “I am looking forward to it.”

It was then that the library was bathed in light of all different colors, as though the sun were shining through a stained-glass window. It was the alert that afternoon lessons were about to begin. I heard the first-years farther inside the reading room let out noises of surprise, then Schwartz and Weiss hurried over.

“Milady. The warning.”

“Must go. Hurry.”

Ah... But I haven’t asked about this “gramps” person yet!

Even so, my slow walking speed meant that we had to leave as soon as possible. I would need to ask during the tea party instead, or whenever I could next visit the library.

“I’ll come back soon,” I said. “Schwartz, Weiss, please continue your work.”

We exited the library with Schwartz and Weiss hurrying us along. The apprentice attendants and scholars headed to their specialty buildings, while the first-years, apprentice knights, and I returned to the main building.

“Sister, we first-years must now go to the auditorium,” Charlotte said. “May we meet again soon.”

The first-years all went to the auditorium together for their written lessons, while we second-years had practical lessons. Our classrooms were split according to status, so Philine excused herself and turned a corner.

“Let’s get Lady Rozemyne to the Small Hall and then hurry along ourselves,” Cornelius said to Leonore and Judithe as they matched my slow but graceful walking speed. They would need to go to their course building to the north after seeing me off.

I poured mana into my enhancement magic tools to increase my pace. I was now able to move without them, but I had been told to keep them on at all times for situations like this.

I need to go as quickly as possible while still preserving my elegance!

“You are going to be learning more schtappe transformations today,” Rihyarda said. “Pay attention, milady. You will need to know how to make these weapons and shields to protect yourself.”

Schtappe Transformation

I entered the Small Hall and saw that the usually pure-white floor was covered with a large cloth. It was embroidered with a magic circle much like the one Ferdinand and the tax officials used for teleporting things. I examined it, wondering what it was going to be used for, when suddenly I made eye contact with Rauffen. He was standing in front of the cloth with his hands on his waist and his feet planted firmly on the ground.

“Oho! Lady Rozemyne! Now I’m looking forward to class!” he said with a grin wide enough to flash his pearly whites. I had no idea what he was so excited about, so I gave a polite smile in response and then began looking for Hannelore. I needed to invite her to the tea party for bookworms.

I glanced around the hall excitedly and soon found Hannelore talking to Wilfried. It was usually best to avoid interrupting so that I wouldn’t come across as rude, but that wouldn’t be a problem in this case.

“Good day, Wilfried, Lady Hannelore.”

“You’re pretty late, Rozemyne,” Wilfried said.

“So it may seem, but I came here straight from the library, walking as fast as I could.”

Hannelore smiled. “You were at the library, Lady Rozemyne?” she asked.

“Indeed. I supplied Schwartz and Weiss with mana while the first-years were being registered.”

“Schwartz and Weiss must be doing well, then. Now I wish to go to the library myself...”

As expected, Hannelore was invested in the library. My heart swelled with joy, and I moved right to talking about the tea party. I would bring it up today and then have my attendants send a formal invitation at a later date.

“I was speaking with Professor Solange about your wish to join the Library Committee,” I said. “Would you mind attending a tea party of bookworms, perhaps?”

“A tea party of bookworms?” she repeated.

“Yes. Professor Solange is the only librarian at the moment, and she cannot leave the library. She was hoping to hold a tea party while there are still few students visiting. How fares your schedule, Lady Hannelore?”

“Let me think...” Hannelore looked up toward the ceiling, deep in thought. “I am due to finish my written classes relatively soon, so a morning ten or so days from now would seem feasible.”

“In that case, I will prepare for the tea party and invite the both of you. Of course, the tea party itself is going to be held in the library.”

“I am looking forward to it,” Hannelore said with a pleased smile. A beat later, fourth-and-a-half bell rang, so we stopped our chatting and turned to face the teacher. Primevere was here too, but Rauffen stood out due to the excitement shining in his eyes.

“Alright, everyone’s here?” Rauffen asked in a loud voice after the final chime of the bell, his eyes sweeping over the gathered students. “Today, we’re going to be morphing our schtappes. Your goal for this year is to learn to make weapons and shields.”

Whoo, boy... Professor Rauffen sure seems lively today.

“Protecting oneself and one’s duchies requires power—the power to fight! And that doesn’t just apply to knights!” Rauffen declared. He then went on to describe the role that Dunkelfelger had played in Yurgenschmidt history and extol the importance of personal combat prowess.

“Members of an archducal family need to have the power to protect their own duchies!” he continued, his fists passionately clenched. “In the end, only the archduke can defend their foundation magic. Now, it’s obvious that archknights serving archducal families need to have their battle prowess honed to a fine edge, but attendants need to be able to protect their lords and ladies too. The same goes for scholars. Danger can strike at any moment, and you can hardly call yourself a retainer if you can’t even buy time for the archduke to escape. Strength! Strength is more important than anything!”

The boys listened with sparkling eyes, while the girls seemed mostly disinterested; the contrast between the sexes was apparent at a glance. I did see some girls listening with enthusiasm, though. No doubt they were aiming to be apprentice knights.

It’s almost uncomfortable how intensely Professor Rauffen feels about

this, but... he's not wrong. Everyone needs good offense and defense. Danger really can strike at any moment.

A noble from another duchy could go on a rampage in your temple, kidnappers could break into your duchy's castle... Of course, I was drawing from my own personal experiences, but the point remained—it was the duty of nobles with plentiful mana to protect themselves and others. It seemed the future apprentice scholars and attendants weren't quite getting it, though. They looked confused. Perhaps they hadn't experienced danger for themselves now that the civil war was over.

Primevere stepped in front of Rauffen with a composed smile. She looked over the girls, then said in a gentle voice: "I imagine many of you believe that you need only leave fighting to the knights and men. Those of you who do are gravely mistaken. Women need the power to protect themselves more than anyone; we must not allow boorish men of ill intent to get near us."

Several of the previously unenthused girls snapped their heads up, now with a more serious look in their eyes. Primevere gave one brisk nod upon seeing this and then returned the stage to Rauffen.

"Glad to see you're all so motivated now," Rauffen said. "Alright. Let's start with shields!"

Each kind of weapon had its own strengths and weaknesses, and apprentice knights naturally took interest in different weapons than apprentice scholars and attendants. Shields, however, were equal. After explaining his intention to start with something that applied to us all, Rauffen took out several shields from the magic circle with Primevere. They were long and rectangular with simple Wind magic circles engraved into them.

"We made these out of metal to help you all form a consistent, uniform shape," Rauffen said. "Envision this shield and chant 'geteilt' to transform your schtappe. Like this!"

Rauffen chanted "*geteilt*" and, as expected, his schtappe morphed into a shield. The sight reminded me—during ditter last year, the apprentice knights from Dunkelfelger had used shields that were almost identical to the ones used by our own apprentice knights. I nodded to myself, realizing that this was because everyone learned to make them the same way in this class.

"Having the shields be a uniform size makes it easier to line them side

by side, which lets you block large-scale attacks together," Rauffen continued. "And since geteilts are made of mana, they aren't heavy either. Even the frailest girl shouldn't have a problem holding one."

The shields were made with the expectation that knights would use them, but even so, they were comfortably light. As the frailest girl in the room, I sure appreciated that. I moved to make one myself, at which point Rauffen raised his shield high into the air to show the simple magic circle on it.

"Each shield should have this magic circle engraved on it," he said. "This strengthens its defensive power by adding the protection of the Goddess of Wind. Get this circle right and you'll have Schutzaria's shield."

Hm? But in that case, wouldn't I get better results by envisioning Schutzaria's divine instrument in the temple instead?

Its magic circles were a lot more complexly woven than those on the simple shield, and it was dotted with feystones to boot. Wilma had drawn the shield for karuta and picture books, so when I made Wind shields, I always envisioned the divine instrument.

That said, I'm not too sure how I would turn Schutzaria's shield into a rectangle.

Schutzaria's shield was, in my mind, circular. And when one wanted to protect oneself and others in a wide area, hemispherical shields were generally ideal. Making a standard rectangular shield was simple enough but trying to overwrite what was already such a clear mental image for me was much more complicated. By trying to force things, I would probably end up making it harder for myself to make proper Wind shields from this point onward. I alone was frowning at my hands while Hannelore, Wilfried, and the others practiced geteilt.

"Lady Rozemyne, why are you wearing such a deep frown?" Hannelore asked.

"Is this lesson really that difficult?" Wilfried added. They were both peering down at me as I continued to frown, having not even formed my schtappe yet.

"I'm struggling because Schutzaria's shield is round in my mind," I replied. "We have to visualize it as a rectangle instead, but this is much too sudden of a request."

"Schutzaria's shield is circular? Have you seen it before, Lady

Rozemyne?” Hannelore asked, looking at me quizzically. It seemed that the average noble didn’t even know the shapes of the divine instruments, since they never visited their temples.

“The divine shields that decorate shrines are circular,” I explained. “I simply feel much more familiar with that shape.”

“Why not go ask Professor Rauffen if you can use a circular shield instead, then?” Wilfried suggested.

“At this rate, I will not be able to pass in one day. I suppose it cannot hurt to try...” I mused. Rauffen was looking over the students, so I approached and made my request. “May I use a circular shield instead? As one raised in the temple, I am much more familiar with the circular divine instrument than any other shield.”

“I understand your problem, Lady Rozemyne, but all apprentice knights need rectangular shields,” he replied with a frown. “You can’t practice with everyone else otherwise.”

I struggled to understand. Perhaps it was important for apprentice knights to have uniform shields so that they could train alongside others, but I was an archduke candidate; I had no intention of fighting in any squadrons.

“Professor Rauffen, I am an archduke candidate,” I said. “I do not plan to fight in groups, so I am confident that a circular shield will serve me just fine.”

Rauffen looked at me with folded arms and an even deeper frown, apparently as confused as me. “You’re Lord Ferdinand’s disciple and you’re not going to take the knight course?” he asked. “Why not?”

“Why not...? Because I’m not interested,” I replied plainly.

Rauffen’s jaw dropped so suddenly that I feared it might dislocate. He shook his head desperately and muttered, “No, this can’t be...” Then, after a moment, his eyes widened in apparent realization. “But what about ditter?!” he exclaimed. “You can’t participate in ditter without taking knight courses!”

“I do not understand why you are so surprised, Professor Rauffen. I am not particularly interested in ditter to begin with.”

“What?!”

Hold on a second... Does he think I’m a ditter fan?!

The next thing I knew, Rauffen was extolling the virtues of ditter. My

eyes desperately flitted around the hall; I could guess that he wouldn't be willing to return to the topic of shields for quite some time.

S-Someone! Heeelp!

My pleading stare was met by none other than Primevere. She placed a hand on her cheek, muttered, "Oh dear," and then walked over with all the elegance of a calmly flowing stream. "You mustn't speak of ditter so needlessly during class, Rauffen."

"But Primevere. Lady Rozemyne said—"

Primevere raised a hand to interrupt him. "Do show us your shield, dear," she said to me with a kind smile. She positively exuded strength and reliability despite her soft demeanor, so I nodded and started pouring mana into my schtappe. I closed my eyes and visualized Schutzaria's shield. I didn't have anyone to protect, so I decided that something the size of a larger pot lid should do.

I chanted "*geteilt*" and a shield of Schutzaria just like the ones I had made through prayer many times before appeared in my hand. It was yellow to match her divine color and partly translucent, and on its surface was a magic circle that looked on the outside like a complex decorative pattern. It was just as I had envisioned it.

"It's a divine instrument..." Rauffen said, surprised, staring closely at my shield. A buzz ran through the surrounding students as well; there was unfortunately no helping it, considering that I was the only person with a circular shield while everyone else focused on making rectangular ones.

This is all for the sake of passing. I need to pass today.

I eyed the professors with my shield in hand, wanting to know whether I would pass or fail. Primevere looked at the shield and then nodded with a smile. "Now, let us see whether it functions," she said.

"Right. Ready your shield!" Rauffen declared, his expression betraying his determination. He pulled a feystone out from a leather pouch at his side and pinched it between his thumb and index finger to show its size—about half as large as his thumb. Then, he wound up his arm and threw the feystone at my shield.

"Eep!"

I knew that my shield would protect me, but the sight of what was essentially a rock closing in on me at such tremendous speed was terrifying nonetheless. I instinctively started pouring mana into my shield.

The moment the feystone made contact, it shot back in the direction it had come from with a resounding bang. A gust of wind from my shield pushed Rauffen away, and at the same time, one of the bracelets on the wrist I was using to hold the shield started to glow. One of the protective charms on me had activated; it seemed to have registered the thrown feystone as a hostile attack on my person.

“Professor Rauffen! Defend yourself!” I shouted. “A counterattack is coming!”

“*Geteilt*!”

Rauffen must have been used to battle, as his expression changed the instant he saw my bracelet begin to glow. He leapt up and formed a shield at the same time as I shouted my warning. A breath later, attack magic shot out of my bracelet and flew straight at him. His quick reaction meant he was able to block it, which made me sigh in relief.

“What was that, Lady Rozemyne?” he asked.

“A charm that Ferdinand gave me for protection, in case something happened. You’re lucky. Since you only threw a feystone and nothing else, the charm’s counterattack was at minimum power.”

“That was minimum power?!” Rauffen yelped. He was looking at me in wide-eyed shock, but the charm that had activated was the weakest of all the brutal and terrifying ones that Ferdinand was affording me. The attack wouldn’t have proven fatal—it would have hurt to high heaven, but Rauffen would have survived.

Incidentally, Ferdinand had mentioned that the most brutal of all the charms likewise wouldn’t kill the attacker. I could still remember the twisted grin he had worn when telling me.

“My reason for having these charms is a secret,” I said. “Now, that aside... Do I pass?”

“You *did* manage to recreate a divine instrument... Very well. Your shield passes, Lady Rozemyne,” Primevere said with a smile.

Having completed my task, I chanted “*rucken*” to return my schtappe to its original form and then decided to return to Wilfried and Hannelore. The moment I turned around, however, everyone stepped aside, opening up a path for me. The fear that tinged their expressions was no doubt directed at Ferdinand’s charms. Still, they had gone through the trouble of allowing me past, so I walked through them and over to Wilfried.

“I passed. It seems that, while apprentice knights must have uniform shields, an archduke candidate such as I may use a circular design,” I said to him informatively.

“Rozemyne, is that really all you have to say about what just happened...?” Wilfried asked, cradling his head in his hands. I racked my brain for what else he might want me to explain.

“Let’s see... Oh, right. The divine instrument shield uses more complex magic circles, which apparently boosts its defense. Since you will not be taking the knight course either, Wilfried, you might want to make one as well.”

“That’s not what I mean. You sure have some deadly charms, huh? Couldn’t you at least take them off during practical lessons? You’re clearly putting everyone in danger,” Wilfried clarified, his brow furrowed as he shook his head at me.

He was right that the charms were dangerous, but they would only activate when I was attacked. More importantly, Ferdinand had deemed it necessary for me to wear them; I couldn’t just remove them without consulting him.

“It is not my intention to bring danger to others,” I said. “I will allow you to remove them, but only if you can acquire permission from Ferdinand. Will you consult him?”

Wilfried immediately shook his head in response, wearing the fake smile of a noble all the while.

“That’s enough focusing on shields,” Rauffen announced. “If you want to practice more, do it on your own time.”

Hannelore exhaled; she could make a shield on the spot, but adding the magic circle was proving too much for her. Wilfried, meanwhile, was agonizing over whether he should go with the standard rectangular shield that everyone else was using or the more powerful divine shield. It seemed that he was feeling quite pressured, since he needed to decide and start locking the image in his mind. He was having such a hard time precisely because he knew Schutzaria’s shield so clearly from karuta and the bible.

“Ngh... I’ve spent the whole lesson thinking about this!” Wilfried groaned.

“You are not being denied your paradise until you finish your classes,

Wilfried, so I would suggest you take your time and relax. That is how you came up with your crest-emblazoned schtappe last year, correct?" I asked. He had spent a lot of time agonizing over that too. With enough time, perhaps he would think up an impressive-looking shield as well.

As we continued our conversation, Rauffen and Primevere began taking weapon after weapon out of the teleportation circle. They lined up a sword, a spear, a scythe, an axe... I noted that they were all melee weapons.

"No bows, I see. Strange, since Ferdinand used one..." I muttered to myself.

"Bows are more complicated, I am told, since it requires so much practice to shoot them accurately. That is why they are not taught here, in this basic class," Hannelore explained, evidently having overheard me. "Archery is first taught in the knight course."

"Your knowledge is impressive, Lady Hannelore," I replied.

"Dunkelfelger has a greater proportion of knights than other duchies, so the apprentice knights always end up the center of conversation in our dormitory..." Hannelore said shyly, lowering her eyes. It seemed that the mood there was similar to a boys' locker room back on Earth. I hoped the quiet, book-loving Hannelore didn't stick out too much.

"Next up are weapons," Rauffen said. "I'm sure that some of the would-be scholars and attendants among us have never seen these up close before. Pick the one you like the most and morph your schtappe into it. Apprentice knights will need to learn to wield a sword and one other weapon. Understood?"

With that, everyone moved over to the weapons. Wilfried seemed to be walking in a particular hurry; he was probably fairly interested in them too.

"Chant 'schwert' for a sword, 'lanze' for a spear, 'riesesichel' for a scythe, 'axt' for an axe, and..."

As Rauffen listed the chants for the various weapons, I thought about which I would prefer. In terms of actually creating the weapon, spears would most likely be the simplest. I could immediately visualize Leidenschaft's spear, thanks to having seen it on a daily basis and even holding it in my hands before.

The problem is whether I could actually use it...

"Lady Rozemyne, will you not be looking at the weapons?" Hannelore asked.

“I do not need to,” I replied. “I can already create one.”

“You can? Is it perhaps another divine instrument?” Her red eyes sparkled as she leaned forward, gazing at me intently. She looked so hopeful, and I would never let a friend of mine down.

“Lady Hannelore... Would you like to see Leidenschaft’s spear?”

“May I?”

I took out my schtappe and closed my eyes, visualizing Leidenschaft’s spear. It was the same weapon I had used to slay the schnesturm, and it was so thoroughly engraved in my memory that I could even remember the number and the size of the feystones embedded into it.

Beneath thick ashen clouds prowled the schnesturm, the source of the pure-white blizzard buffeting the flurry of yellow-capes fighting to end the winter. Above it all, I was gripping Leidenschaft’s spear, pouring in my mana until it reached its limit and started glowing blue. The magic circles were clear in my mind.

“*Lanze*.”

A spear just as I envisioned appeared in my hands. Perhaps because I had been visualizing the schnesturm battle, it was pulsating with blue light as though it were filled with mana, which made it look especially threatening.

“Is that Leidenschaft’s spear...?” Hannelore whispered, awestruck. “It looks so beautiful.”

Rauffen grimaced at the glowing spear and ran over. “Rozemyne, what is that?!” he demanded, clearly on guard.

“Leidenschaft’s spear. I was raised in the temple, so it’s the weapon I’m most familiar with,” I replied. It was a preprepared answer, intended to explain my familiarity with the divine instruments. “Do I need to test this as well, Professor Rauffen?”

“With that much mana in it, who knows what might happen...” Rauffen muttered. “I’ll give you a passing grade. Just unmorph it, please.” He went on to groan that he could have seen its destructive power with his own eyes had we only been in the knight building, but that was too bad. I chanted “*rucken*” and returned my schtappe to its usual form.

“Lady Rozemyne, I thank you ever so much for showing me such a wondrous sight,” Hannelore said. Leidenschaft’s spear was a little too cumbersome for me to want it as my primary weapon, but I had received a

passing grade and my friend was happy.

Everything worked out in the end.

“Do you not need to see the weapons either, Lady Hannelore?” I asked.

“I am already familiar with them; the problem is deciding which one to settle on,” she replied. “I am not proficient with any one weapon in particular, so I am struggling to envision which would serve me best in a defensive capacity.”

“I suppose I am not particularly skilled with spears... Perhaps I will need to think of something better to protect myself with.” I started pondering the matter with Hannelore. Spears were out of the question for someone of my build, and swinging a sword around seemed impossible. I wanted something lighter and simpler.

In terms of ranged weapons, I could probably manage better with a crossbow, even if they are on the weaker side. I could even copy Ferdinand and have my arrows split apart into a rain of death to cover up my bad aim a little.

It seemed beyond obvious that I was less of a melee fighter and should spec into long-range combat. That way, I could attack both offensively *and* defensively. It was cowardly, sure, but that was exactly what I wanted. I cared more about my safety than my honor.

Hm... The best weapon for me is one that’s easy to use and that I can use while riding Lessy.

Unfortunately enough, during my Urano days, I hadn’t really been one to use weapons.

Maybe a kitchen knife or a sculpting knife could double as a weapon, but I don’t want to use either of those. They probably wouldn’t be very useful during a feybeast attack either. Not that I’d really know, though; I’m such a pacifist that I never considered using them for violence. Oh, but I have been on the receiving end of an attack before.

I recalled the time Shuu had taken a toy gun and shot at me when we were kids; the tip would flash with light and make a noise to simulate gunshots. He had demanded that I play dead, so I would roll around on the ground and read. Once summer came, he often shot me in the back while I was focused on my books.

“A (water gun)...?” I whispered to myself. All of a sudden, the schtappe in my hand was replaced with a translucent, cheap-looking water gun

perfect for kids.

Wowee! It looks... pathetically weak!

Strengthening the Weapon

I couldn't imagine the gun in my hand serving as a very competent weapon; a spurt of water was hardly dangerous enough to be effective.

"Lady Rozemyne, whatever might you be holding?" Hannelore asked. "Is it a weapon?"

Before I could even respond, Rauffen raced over and stared down at the water gun in my hand. "Is this a new weapon you've invented?!" he exclaimed. It was such an immediate response that I started to suspect he had been listening in on our conversation.

"No!" I shot back. "It is nothing that significant. In fact, this is merely a children's toy."

"Nah, nah, nah. Looks to me like this is some great new creation that's going to change warfare as we know it. Could you demonstrate it for me?" Rauffen asked. His booming voice had caught the attention of all those in earshot, and their prying eyes seemed to ask what crazy thing I was about to do next. I wished they would just turn back around.

They're staring at me like I'm waist-deep in dangerous weapons! And then there's the whole ordeal with my deadly charms! It's not fair! I'm not violent! This is just a toy!

The whispers I was hearing were surely not positive ones. I had already received a passing grade for morphing my schtappe, so I wanted nothing more than to run away and take refuge in the library.

"Come on, Lady Rozemyne. Strike your enemies!" Rauffen declared. He pointed at some dummies wrapped in cloth, which he had apparently set up at some point. They must have been made for testing out the specs of transformed weapons; I could see a boy who was presumably an apprentice knight swinging a sword at one.

He wants me to stand next to that cool, powerful-looking boy and squirt a target with a water gun? I'm going to look so lame!

I tried to shake the embarrassing thought from my mind and then looked up at Rauffen. "As I said, this is a mere toy. It is not usable as a weapon."

“Hm. So you want to hide your new weapon, huh? I’d expect nothing less from Ferdinand’s disciple.”

“I am not attempting to hide anything. There is simply nothing for me to show.”

“I want to see it,” Rauffen said, his fists clenched in determination. The sparkle in his eyes made it unfortunately clear just how excited he was about my water gun. At this point, I had no choice but to show it—to prove to him how ill-suited of a weapon it really was.

I’ll turn that look of hope into one of despair!

The other students crowded around to watch as I stepped in front of the cloth-wrapped dummy. A heavy silence had fallen over the hall, so absolute that I could hear those swallowing nervously. All eyes were on me, and their stares burned.

“Observe,” I said, pointing the gun at the dummy. My form was perfect, and with that, I pulled the tiny trigger.

Spurt!

A spout of water shot from my gun, traveled a short distance through the air, and then struck the floor perhaps a few inches short of the dummy. The splash glimmered for a brief moment before disappearing entirely. It seemed that the gun used my mana rather than actual water, and since the mana had disappeared on its own, there was nothing for me to clean up. How wonderful.

I was personally quite impressed with the display, but everyone else looked somewhat baffled. Rauffen shook his head as though he couldn’t or simply didn’t want to understand.

“Er, Lady Rozemyne... What in the world...?” he asked carefully. “That didn’t look like much of a weapon to me.”

“I did tell you—this is only a children’s toy.”

“Can I ask what it’s actually used for...?”

“Hm. Surprising people, I suppose.”

“I see. Well, you succeeded there...” Rauffen said, slumping his shoulders with a look of indescribable disappointment. As I chanted “*rucken*” to revert my schtappe, I hoped that his despair was severe enough for him to stop inviting me to ditter games.

Once my water gun was gone, the other students lost interest and returned to their own practice. I let out a sigh of relief, free from the peanut

gallery at last, and returned to Hannelore. She looked sick with worry.

“My sincerest apologies, Lady Rozemyne,” she said nervously. “It was because of my own misunderstanding that Professor Rauffen made such a scene... You said from the beginning that it was only a toy, but he refused to relent...”

Wilfried shook his head. “It’s not your fault, Lady Hannelore,” he noted, trying to console her.

“Please do not let it bother you,” I added. “Professor Rauffen jumped to his own conclusions. The blame does not rest on you.”

“But—”

“Professor Rauffen overheard your comment and nothing more. It was just a bit of unfortunate timing.”

“I-I suppose...” Hannelore said with a nod. A weak smile formed on her face as I consoled her, but for some reason, she seemed even more depressed than before.

Sixth bell rang before long, and our schtappe-morphing class came to an end.

After dinner, Wilfried and I called over our retainers so that we could give our reports on the events of the day’s practical lessons. We told them how I had surprised everyone by making Schutzaria’s shield and Leidenschaft’s spear, how one of Ferdinand’s defensive charms had shot back at Rauffen during class, and how I had made a water gun.

“You made Schutzaria’s shield and Leidenschaft’s spear?!”

“A defensive attack during a test... We are lucky Professor Rauffen was the proctor. This could have become quite the incident had Professor Fraularm been the target.”

Everyone began commenting on the matter with widened eyes, but even then, one thing was clear—nobody was more surprised about Ferdinand’s charm activating than me. Maybe I was a bit late in counting my blessings, but given how Fraularm viewed me as an enemy, I certainly was glad that it hadn’t been her.

“Show some sympathy for us,” Wilfried groaned. “Your retainers and I need to mention all this in our report back to Ehrenfest. Think about how we feel.”

I shot him a stern look and then recalled how much our guardians had agonized over Wilfried writing such unclear and incomplete reports. No

doubt he and his apprentice scholars had gotten much better at composing reports since then.

"Shall I write them in your place, then?" I suggested.

"So that you can leave out anything that reflects badly on you?"

"Not at all," I gasped, fixing him with an offended glare. "I would write only the truth, in brief and concise language."

Cornelius gave a heavy sigh. "And your brief, concise report containing only the truth would probably be nothing more than: 'I passed my practical lessons again.' From the bottom of my heart, I am grateful that you and Lord Wilfried are in the same grade, Lady Rozemyne. Your reports are much too lacking."

Talk about rude. Our lesson had been about transforming one's schtappe into a shield and then a weapon, and I had managed both successfully. What else was there to report? I was a child raised in the temple, so my guardians would surely understand that I could only make Schutzaria's shield, and the water gun was simply a toy that had ended up disappointing Rauffen. Ferdinand would probably want to know how his charms had reacted to the feystone for research purposes, but that was about it.

"If you are dissatisfied with my methods then you may write the report as you wish," I said. "I have done nothing that I would not want them to hear."

"You've got it all mixed up, Rozemyne. They asked you not to do anything that would demand reports like this in the first place," Wilfried said. It must have been a fair point, as Rihyarda gave a firm nod in agreement.

In contrast to everyone else, Hartmut seemed fascinated. He leaned forward with an unmistakable sparkle in his eye. "Splendid, Lady Rozemyne. I believe that Schutzaria's shield and Leidenschaft's spear are perfect for the Saint of Ehrenfest."

"As loath as I am to rain on your parade, Hartmut, spears are unwieldy and not my weapon of choice. I do not have the strength to aim and throw them at my targets," I said. It was only because Ferdinand had been there to help me that I had managed to strike the schnesturm. If someone had told me to do that on my own, I could say with complete confidence that I would fail.

"That is what enhancements are for, Lady Rozemyne."

“Hartmut... I am learning enhancement magic so that I can return some semblance of normalcy to my everyday life, not so that I can throw massive spears.”

I could move around without my enhancement magic tools now, but only at a lumber; I still required them to have any chance of walking at the same pace as everyone else. I was already at a disadvantage due to my small stature, which meant I needed the help of others to achieve a lot of what I wanted to do.

“But you will need a weapon to use when the time comes,” Hartmut said. “If a spear is too unwieldy, then you must think of an effective alternative. What shall you do?”

“I do understand my need for a weapon,” I replied. “If possible, I would prefer something that can be used from a distance while riding my highbeast—perhaps something I could hold in one hand and use through the window.”

The apprentice knights exchanged conflicted glances. “With one hand, Lady Rozemyne? Can you even hold a dagger with two?”

“Are the charms you received from Lord Ferdinand not meant to be your weapons, Lady Rozemyne?”

They weren’t wrong. Ferdinand had determined that I needed these charms precisely because he couldn’t count on my fighting capabilities.

“Bleh. I’m done thinking about this,” Wilfried interjected. “She passed her classes, and Uncle’s charms will serve her well enough. End of discussion. I’ll write the report.”

And with that, our meeting came to an end. I returned to my room and rolled around on my bed, pondering the weapons that Wilfried had just told me not to bother thinking about. Ferdinand’s charms were powerful, but I didn’t want to be entirely reliant on them; it was easy to imagine scenarios where I was surrounded by threats and ended up running out of them. Leidenschaft’s spear might not have been a good match for me, but I still needed a weapon—preferably one that wasn’t a children’s toy.

“If only I had a real (gun) instead of a toy (water gun)...” I muttered, deep in thought. And then realization struck me.

Wait a moment... All I did was say “water gun,” right? I didn’t actually chant a spell.

I seemed to recall that chanting a spell was necessary to make other

weapons. It was possible to recreate the shape without one, but the spell was necessary to make the schtappe actually function as a sword or spear. I took out my schtappe, confused, and whispered “water gun” again. This time, nothing happened.

“Why...? Oh, because I wasn’t visualizing it?”

I shut my eyes, visualized the water gun, and then said the words again. This time, my schtappe transformed. Further experimentation was clearly needed. I reverted my schtappe to its usual form, pictured a sword, and then said “sword” in Japanese.

“Hm? That didn’t work?”

My schtappe morphed when I visualized divine instruments and chanted the spell, but not when I spoke in Japanese. I couldn’t figure out that pattern. Nothing in the vein of “printer,” “photocopier,” or “scissors” seemed to work either; the only thing I could make by speaking in Japanese was a cheap-looking toy water gun. Perhaps there were other items that would work, but I had no way to figure out what they were.

I took the translucent water gun and fired it a few times from where I was lying on the bed. The “water” inside disappeared immediately upon hitting something, and even when I shot my covers, they didn’t become the slightest bit wet. Most curious of all, however, was that the amount of water inside never seemed to decrease; I could use it as much as I wanted until my mana ran out.

“I wonder whether I can power up the (water gun) somehow?”

I could grip the water gun comfortably in one hand, meaning I could steer my Pandabus with the other, and using it was as easy as squeezing the trigger. No reloading was necessary either, since it automatically used my mana as ammunition. I just needed to improve its range and power—then it was likely to be the perfect weapon for me.

“When it comes to using water as a weapon, I suppose there are water jet cutters... But just how much pressure would it take to kill a person using one of those? I can’t really imagine it. Maybe I could try using a fire hose or something to blast out a ton of water? Nah, I could just use waschen in that case... No need to modify a water gun.”

I played with the weight of the water gun in my hand as I made and then shot down my own suggestions. The mana inside, which looked entirely like water, sloshed around.

“Seeing as this is mana and not water, perhaps I could make it come out as the arrows that Ferdinand uses. Like when he was fighting the trombe, I could just shoot and...”

I pulled the trigger, thinking about how cool it would be if an arrow shot out... and then one actually did. That one arrow soon became several, presumably because I had been thinking about the time Ferdinand hunted the trombe, and they tore through the canopy above my bed. The arrows disappeared once they reached the ceiling, but the damage was already done.

Well... that happened.

I was blinking in surprise at the torn canopy when Rihyarda rushed over and threw aside my bed curtains. “Milady! What happened?!” she cried.

“I, er... Um...”

Rihyarda saw the water gun in my hand and the holes above my bed and immediately pieced together the situation. Her eyebrows shot up in anger, and she regarded me with a gaze so sharp it was like a razor. Moments later, lightning struck.

“Milady! What are you thinking, using your schtappe in bed?! Put away that dangerous weapon and go straight to sleep!”

“Sorry! I’ll go to sleep right away!” I squeaked. I chanted “*rucken*” to get rid of my water gun and then immediately retreated underneath my covers.

I’m sorry! So, so sorry! I didn’t think it would actually shoot out arrows!

We made our way to the dining hall for breakfast the next morning. Once all of my retainers were gathered, Rihyarda let out a sigh. “Last night, milady experimented with her schtappe in bed and shot her canopy to pieces with a so-called ‘water gun,’” she said. “Hartmut, add this to your report to the castle.”

“Erm, Lady Rozemyne... It’s dangerous to handle weapons in bed...” Philine added, blinking at me incredulously. I averted my eyes; the events of yesterday’s practical lessons were one thing, but I was absolutely going to be lectured for this.

“Didn’t you say the water gun was a toy and not a weapon just yesterday?” Cornelius asked, making no attempt to hide his exasperation.

“It truly is supposed to be a toy,” I replied. “But since it contains my

mana rather than water, I wondered whether I could make it shoot arrows, and whether those arrows could then split apart. I gave it a try and, well... My canopy ended up a sacrifice for scientific progress."

"Lady Rozemyne, may I see this water gun?" Hartmut asked, leaning closer.

"Me too! Me too!" Judithe added, her violet eyes sparkling with excitement. "You can fire arrows with a single hand, right? Do you think I could use one too?"

Despite their exhaustion, my other retainers seemed equally curious about my water gun.

"Shall we go to the gathering spot before morning classes?" Leonore suggested. "It would be too dangerous to use this new weapon in the dormitory, and although we could use it somewhere else outside, I worry that the snow might be bad for Lady Rozemyne's health."

Everyone agreed with her assessment, so it was decided that I would debut my water gun at the gathering spot. We headed there immediately after breakfast. The others in the common room asked where we were going as they studied, but Hartmut deftly evaded their questions.

We flew through the air on our highbeasts until we eventually reached the pillar of yellow light. It was still strange to see one spot without any snow, but either way, due to all the feybeasts that converged at the gathering spot, the knights would end up very busy once we were inside.

"Once we get inside, I will use an attack whether there is a feybeast or not. Knights, stay by my side. Do not get in front of me under any circumstances," I said. "Right. Here I go. Water gun!"

I focused my mind and morphed my schtappe into a water gun. Then, with my left hand still on the wheel of my Pandabus, I extended my right as far as I could out the window and aimed toward the gathering spot.

"Eep!"

My vision twisted for a moment as though I were passing right through a magic barrier, and an instant later, I saw several feybeasts in front of me. I eyed one and, while visualizing Ferdinand slaying the trombes, pulled the trigger of my water gun. Liquid mana shot out and turned into a glowing arrow, which split apart and started downward. It wasn't long before several of the arrows pierced one of the feybeasts.

“Yesss!” I cried.

“Ooh!” echoed Hartmut.

The feybeast wavered for a moment at the sudden attack and then bared its teeth at us. Although my rain of arrows had struck their mark, none had managed a killing blow. Defeating a feybeast in one move was evidently not so easy.

“Go!” Cornelius shouted as he sped up on his highbeast and then plunged toward the feybeast. His sword was already in his hand, and he slew the feybeast in the blink of an eye.

“We have seen the strength of Lady Rozemyne’s weapon!” Leonore called. “Let us depart at once!”

And so, we turned straight around to return to the dorm. We only had three apprentice knights with us, which wouldn’t have been enough to deal with all the feybeasts if we attracted too many.

“I couldn’t kill the feybeasts, even with my new weapon...” I mumbled, unable to contain my sadness. I had wanted to impress everyone by slaying several with a single blow, but reality was not so kind.

“No, but you did more than enough,” Cornelius said, trying to console me. “I was surprised by how much damage you did to that feybeast; there’s no doubt in my mind that your attack would have killed a weaker one.”

Apparently, the feybeasts we had encountered were on the stronger side.

“That was an amazing weapon, but not one I think I could use,” Judithe said, eyeing my water gun with regret. “I don’t have enough mana to shoot out that many arrows at once.”

My water gun was small, light, and easy to grip in one hand, but its attack power was fiercely dependent on one’s mana quantity. Truly, it was a weapon made for me.

Although it kind of stopped being a water gun the moment it fired out arrows...

Even so, it was unexpectedly strong and convenient to use, so I decided to take it as my weapon of choice. I could slowly improve it over time.

In which case, it doesn’t even need to be a water gun anymore. I want to make it cooler. A more realistic black, maybe, like the ones you get in hard-boiled fiction!

We returned to the dorm, and while everyone else was busy with their studies, I alone struggled to change the appearance of my water gun. I

didn’t want one that was cheap-looking and translucent.

“Ngh. Another failure...”

Unfortunately, I had never even touched a toy version of a black gun, so I couldn’t properly visualize one. No matter how much I tried, I couldn’t get a clear image in my head, and my schtappe didn’t take the shape I wanted. The most I could seem to manage was giving my current water gun a black tinge, but it was still translucent, which was very uncool.

Nooo! At this rate, I won’t even be as hard-boiled as an egg! I’m just a soft, squishy soft-boiled one!

“Now, now, milady. Enough with that frown. Let’s go to the auditorium,” Rihyarda said, hurrying me along. “Today is the day you’ve been waiting for, when everyone passes at once. Focus on the written lessons, not your schtappe.”

I returned my schtappe to its usual form, albeit regretfully. Getting everyone to pass came first; I could focus on improving my water gun once that was over and done with.

One day, I’ll have a supercool gun. Then everyone will think I’m hard-boiled!

Everyone Passing on the First Day

Today was the last day of our written lessons—I was going to make sure of that. From there, I would spend my morning free time studying for next year's classes, improving my water gun, and becoming the coolest, strongest version of myself possible.

"Brother, Sister, I pray for your success. Not that you will need my prayers. You have already inspired the others in your grade to pass on their first day once before..." Charlotte said with a sigh, her hand resting wistfully on her cheek.

Yesterday afternoon, three laynobles in Charlotte's grade had failed their history and geography exams, which meant the first-years had already missed their chance for everyone to pass on the first day. Charlotte had assembled the first-years for a strategy meeting after dinner, while I was busy reporting on how the second-year practical lessons had gone.

"I was not able to ensure the laynobles' success, even with preemptive education and the textbooks. I simply cannot understand how you were able to manage it with no preparation at all..." Charlotte muttered, her bewilderment clear on her face. She had managed the winter playroom for years now, so she had expected guiding the first-years to be relatively simple... but ten days of cramming had ultimately not been enough.

"I wouldn't worry so much, Charlotte. No normal person can copy what this monster does," Wilfried said with the utmost seriousness. "Rozemyne picked out everyone who wasn't yet good enough to pass, figured out their weaknesses, and then came up with a training regimen that ruthlessly whipped them into shape. It was time-consuming enough that she had to cut her sleeping time short, but not even that seemed to faze her. She also stuck with the laynobles to force them to study, putting enormous pressure on them while she did her own studying. I felt so bad for the laynobles, but there was nothing I could do to save them."

I pursed my lips. He was making it sound as though I were as brutal of a teacher as Ferdinand. *Although I can't deny that I've taken a little*

inspiration from him...

"If you'll recall, dear brother, the blame lies with you," I interjected. "If you had not forbidden me from entering the library until all of the first-years passed their written lessons, I would not have been so forceful with their education."

"You're exactly right. I was a fool. I was ignorant. And thanks to that disaster, I learned that any book-related restrictions I give you can't involve other people. Charlotte, learn from my mistake—be careful when trying to control Rozemyne. She expects from others as much as she expects from herself. She'll want you to work as hard as you physically can, no matter what you usually do."

Charlotte gave a solemn nod at this warning. "I must agree; it is unbearably painful to be expected to perform at the same level as Rozemyne," she muttered a little too sincerely.

"I know you must be disappointed that you could not guide all of the first-years to pass right away, but I think this outcome is for the best," Wilfried said. "It's better for them to study at their own pace than be beaten down by an archduke candidate day after day to the point that they're studying even during meals and are too stressed to taste the food." He spoke with the gravity of someone who had endured war, and I could see many of the first-years looking at the second-year laynobles sympathetically. One phrase was written clearly on their faces: *"I'm glad that wasn't me."*

"You are quite right, dear brother," Charlotte said. "Last night, we collectively decided to take our time and try instead for the highest grades possible. We have less to learn than the older students, so we can still succeed in this regard. Having everyone pass right away is going to be our goal for next year. We should have no issue when we have a full year to prepare—isn't that right?"

The first-years gave enthusiastic nods; I could see the bonds of trust that had formed between them. Charlotte had overseen the winter playroom for the three years following her baptism, and now she was competently leading the first-years. She had encouraged them when they failed to all pass in one go and given them a new goal to work toward.

"You first-years may have an advantage in that you have less to learn, but the senior students are well-prepared," I said. "They may have even more honor students than last year, so be wary of complacency."

“Goodness, Sister... Please do not pressure them so,” Charlotte said, shooting me a light glare as we advanced through the central building. We second-years headed to the auditorium, while the first-years prepared to go to their respective classrooms.

“You are going to be doing highbeast creation today, correct?” I asked. “Do your best, everyone.”

“Indeed. I intend to make a drivable highbeast just like yours, Sister. I am very familiar with yours by now, so I may have an advantage,” Charlotte replied with a smile, waving as we went our separate ways. The other first-years followed after her, while we made our way to our final written lessons in the auditorium.

“May we second-years succeed in passing all at once,” I declared.

“We’ve been studying for an entire year; we’re gonna pass for sure,” Wilfried said, looking over our classmates with a confident grin. “The question is how high we can make our grades.”

Last year, after passing our classes, we had immediately started transcribing second-year study guides and making new textbooks. We had shared the fruits of our labor with everyone, making a master copy for everyone to transcribe their own copies from, and overall spent a whole year studying. Assurance was written on everyone’s faces.

“I’m feeling confident this year,” Philine said. She and Roderick were puffing out their chests with pride—although they had struggled with history and geography last year, they were now on top. Everything was going to be fine. I was certain.

We took the seats labeled “ten” and then readied our magic pens. Today would determine whether Ehrenfest’s second-years could pass all of their classes on the first day for the second year in a row. I could feel the eyes of the surrounding students on us.

“Hey, Wilfried.” Ortwin was on his way to the seats labeled “three” when he spotted us and came over. “If you all pass today, that’ll make this your second year in a row. I can hardly believe it. Even we’ve had a few laynobles fail.”

Wilfried gave a sympathetic smile to the gathered Drewanchel students. “We’re hardly comparable. We only need eight people to pass compared to your thirtyish. We have it a lot easier.”

“That’s true, but it’s still a fact that Ehrenfest’s grades have shot up

lately. I'm actually looking forward to all of you passing today. Mark my words, though—we're going to be the ones getting the highest grades," Ortwin said with a breezy smile before heading to his seat.

Wilfried grinned at the encouragement while taking out his textbooks to look over. His dark-green eyes burned with the fire of someone in a competition with their rival.

"We can't let Drewanchel win, eh?" I said.

"Right. But I'm less concerned about us winning as a duchy than making sure my own grades are better than Ortwin's."

Ah. Friendships like this are so nice.

Feeling a little jealous of the relationships Wilfried had forged over the past year, I completed my final bits of cramming. Today's subjects were poetry in literature and sociology, the latter of which covered ethics and economics. All were focused only on the fundamentals, so they weren't too hard.

The bell chimed, and the professors came in. The test would normally have begun right away, but today there was an announcement: tomorrow, on Fruitday, the first-years were going to be gathering their Divine Wills. They were going to have their written lessons in the morning as a result, which meant we second-years would need to have ours in the afternoon instead.

Our literature test was distributed shortly after.

"All passing marks for Drewanchel and Ehrenfest," came the call. Wilfried looked at our classmates, nodded, and then began studying sociology with them at once.

The professor in charge of sociology had changed following the civil war, which meant the content covered in our sociology lessons had changed as well. Our classes were now so different from the ones covered in Ferdinand's study guides that we had needed to go through the trouble of consolidating the old and new material into one book. It was a shame because, although the older syllabus was harder, it seemed more useful for the future.

"The exam will now begin," Fraularm said, standing at the front as our sociology professor. Once all of the tests had been passed out, she smiled and then began reading aloud the first problem.

"Huh?" one of the students muttered. "What the...?"

“We didn’t learn any of this...” another said.

The questions had aroused a commotion from Drewanchel and several nearby archnobles—that is, those who had properly studied. As the noise grew louder still, Fraularm shot the students a harsh look.

“Be silent!” she shrieked. “I will only read the problem aloud three times! Save your questions for when I have finished. You are bothering the other students!” Her high-pitched voice echoed through the auditorium, magnified by a magic tool. It was so piercing that I wanted to cover my ears when she spoke.

Fraularm began reading the problem for a second time, ignoring the lingering murmurs. Soon enough, silence fell. Everyone grabbed their pens and immediately began scribbling away, aware of the consequences for not doing so.

Once the problem had been read three times, there came a cry from Drewanchel. “Professor Fraularm!” As everyone else remained seated and worked on their answers, Ortwin alone abruptly stood up.

“Yes, Drewanchel?” Fraularm asked.

“This test can’t be right. None of this was part of our syllabus last year.”

He was correct—the problem that Fraularm had just read aloud was based on an old syllabus from Ferdinand’s generation. The syllabus had changed once already when Fraularm officially became the sociology professor, which wasn’t unusual in itself, but never before had it changed again during the tenure of the same professor. Fraularm listened for a moment as the other students voiced their disagreement, then her lips curled into a callous grin.

“The syllabus differs from last year?” she said. “Why, of course it does. This is what we shall be studying *this* year. It is not always the case that the syllabus remains the same. This problem was learned by students of the past; I simply adopted it into my lessons because I decided it would be best to learn the wisdom of our forebears.”

If one took her at face value, it would seem as though she were a passionate teacher indeed. After all, she had studied past lessons and adopted into her own classes what she had determined was best for her students to learn.

I would have been moved if she had done this a few years after her assignment, and if not for that grin, I would have thought she was working

her hardest for our sake.

Fraularm's snickering and the smug look she had given after announcing the change was directed not at Ortwin, who had asked the question, but at Ehrenfest. It was impossible not to realize that she had done this specifically to stop us from passing on the first day.

"If you have no more questions, Drewanchel, then you may be seated."

After a brief moment of stunned silence, Ortwin conceded with a quiet, "Understood." He had likewise deduced what was going on, and as he sat down again, he glanced back at us in worry. I could see others giving us sympathetic looks as well, but as Drewanchel, a greater duchy, had achieved nothing through protest, nobody else could offer any further complaints.

"We just need to do what we can," Wilfried whispered. I nodded in response, as did Philine and Roderick, who were carefully eyeing Fraularm.

"Now then... Next question," Fraularm said. Her voice carried through the otherwise silent auditorium as she read the next problem. During her momentary pauses, only the scratching of pens was audible. The test had resumed.

"Is everybody finished, then?"

By the time we had completed our tests, most other duchies had already turned in theirs. There was no way they had been able to properly complete an exam so heavily focused on material not taught for around a decade. Most duchies had given up early and turned in papers that were half unanswered.

The fact that most duchies remained seated despite having finished was no doubt because they were curious about our grades.

"Roderick, turn them in," Wilfried said. Roderick nodded in response and then brought our duchy's test papers over to Fraularm. She took them with a broad grin, as though she had been eagerly awaiting this moment.

"Allow me to begin grading these tests," Fraularm said. But the moment she started looking over our papers, her eyes opened wide, and her hands began to tremble.

"Oho! What splendid answers these are," exclaimed another professor who was grading the tests alongside her.

"Are you satisfied now, Professor Fraularm?" asked a third professor,

looking between her and the tests with amusement. “Ehrenfest is not cheating. Rather, they can even pass tests on material that has not been taught at all.”

“Ngh... All passing grades from Ehrenfest,” Fraularm said, vexation clear in her voice. It was an announcement that sent tremors of surprise throughout the auditorium. Those still scribbling down their answers looked up from their papers and stared at us in shock.

“Everyone passed?!”

“But... how?!”

Their shock inspired a proud grin not just from Wilfried, who remained silent as he gazed across the onlookers, but from Philine and Roderick as well. I was presumably no exception; I could practically feel the smugness oozing from my every pore.

Drewanchel, who had finished their tests first, stood up and flourished their emerald-green capes before approaching us. “Wilfried, congratulations on everyone passing once again,” Ortwin said. “Can you tell me how you managed it? The test didn’t even touch upon anything covered in the syllabus.”

Wilfried gave a nonchalant shrug. “It’s simple. As Professor Fraularm said, the test was based on a syllabus from the previous generation. All we did was study that too.”

The current syllabus was different enough that, after graduating and securing a job, our youth would end up struggling to work properly alongside their superiors. And since the older syllabus was of a higher level, it was more effective for us to just learn everything. Ferdinand had warned us that apprentice knights were not the only ones being educated to a lower standard than before; Ehrenfest was retraining its apprentice knights, new knights, and new scholars based on old standards, so it made sense for us to simply begin learning such things during our time in the Royal Academy.

“We decided to rethink our duchy’s study methods, and in the process, we compared our current lessons to the old ones,” Wilfried continued. “Doing that just so happened to help us with this test.”

We second-years weren’t the only Ehrenfest students looking beyond the current curriculum; we were comparing the old and new syllabi of all courses and writing up guides so that we would not be considered too uneducated when we became adults. Students across all years and courses

were being brought up to shape.

“Now that’s surprising... I think we’ll start doing the same in Drewanchel,” Ortwin said, blinking his light-brown eyes a few times in confusion before regarding us with a grin.

It seemed that Drewanchel was going to be a fairly tough opponent next year; I could already tell that its thirty second-years were all going to pass. I wasn’t particularly excited about this—I much preferred having as comfortable of a win as possible—but Wilfried was wearing a broad smile. He was probably the kind of person who wanted a rival to go all out against.

I reckon we’ll keep the picture book bibles a secret for a bit longer...

“Oh, that’s right. Lady Rozemyne.”

Ortwin addressed me all of a sudden, taking me by surprise. I was pretty sure this was the first time he had ever spoken to me rather than Wilfried. I gazed at him quizzically, trying to look as graceful as possible, at which point he continued.

“A message from Adolphine.”

I instinctively froze, remembering the smirk on Adolphine’s face as she had run her fingers through her glossy hair during the fellowship gathering.

“To quote: ‘If you finish your written lessons today, I imagine you will have time in the morning before returning to Ehrenfest for the Dedication Ritual. If so, I would certainly like to have a tea party with you,’” Ortwin said. “My sister was quite jealous when she heard you had a tea party with Lady Eglantine of Klassenberg before socializing season began.”

No... Nooo! Not a tea party! Blehhh... I don’t want to go. Who knows what she’s going to ask me about.

This was an invitation from Drewanchel, the duchy that had immediately copied our rinsham. I smiled wider, trying to keep my worry from showing on my face. No matter how scared I was, an invitation from Drewanchel was not one that I could refuse. My only choice was to accept.

“Oh my, an invitation from Lady Adolphine?” I said. “How delightful. Tell her I am very much looking forward to it.”

Rest in peace, library time. I knew thee well...

“You don’t look well, milady. Especially considering that everyone passed,” Rihyarda said once we had returned to the dorm, peering down at

me with concern.

“Lady Adolphine of Drewanchel has expressed interest in a tea party,” I said with a sigh. “An invitation will no doubt be arriving soon, so please be ready for it.”

In contrast to my evident depression, my apprentice attendant Brunhilde was meeting this new opportunity with eagerly clenched fists. “Lady Rozemyne, I studied for an entire year to keep up with your excessively fast socializing,” she said, her amber eyes gleaming with motivation. “I shall handle this challenge with aplomb.”

“You certainly do make many promises despite needing to leave for the Dedication Ritual so soon,” Lieseleta said. “You have tea parties scheduled with the music professors, the library staff, Lady Hannelore of Dunkelfelger, and now Lady Adolphine of Drewanchel.” Her small, troubled smile betrayed her true feelings on the matter; my circumstances were so far from Ehrenfest’s norms that they were struggling to keep up.

“Now, now, Lieseleta. Times like these should be celebrated as opportunities to display one’s skills!” Brunhilde said. “It is much too early to begin socializing—I certainly realize this—but I am excited nonetheless. These are preparations worth doing.” She seemed very determined indeed, but considering when socializing season was supposed to begin, I could see the problem on our hands.

“Could I perhaps refuse Drewanchel on the grounds that only the second-years have finished their classes and my retainers are still busy?” I asked.

“It is one thing to refuse invitations from all, but it would be far from acceptable to refuse only Drewanchel,” Brunhilde said.

I responded with a sigh, having expected that answer but hoped not to hear it. The first-years began to return at that same moment. Charlotte was wearing an especially bright smile, but the moment she noticed me, she came rushing over. On closer inspection, she was pale, and she seemed particularly stressed.

“Is something the matter, Charlotte?”

“Erm, Sister... Drewanchel invited me to a tea party during class today. I was told that, as it will no doubt be a nerve-racking experience for me, I am permitted to attend with you.”

Urk... A pincer attack. I’m being assailed on both flanks...

Drewanchel had copied our rinsham production method with ease, and with our hairpins being little more than woven thread, it was only a matter of time before they copied those too. Mom had figured out how to weave the smallest flower just by rolling a finished one around on her palm. If a skilled craftsperson managed to get their hands on one of our hairpins, they would probably need no more than a year to recreate even our most elaborate design.

It wouldn't be quite so easy for them to figure out how Ehrenfest paper was produced, but they would need only investigate the fibers to learn that it was made from plants. For every question they asked me, any answer I gave would surely be picked apart and researched.

I could feel a sense of regret swelling up inside of me. This tea party was the absolute last thing I wanted. Even falling sick and sleeping through the whole thing seemed like a more pleasant alternative.

"Sister, whatever shall we do...?" Charlotte asked, worried.

Ah, but I can't end up bedridden, else Charlotte will need to attend on her own! And she's already so scared... Backing out isn't an option!

I couldn't make Charlotte go alone simply because I was feeling depressed. This was going to be her first big tea party, and as her big sister, I needed to guide her through it.

"Fear not, Charlotte—I am going to be there with you. Let us face Drewanchel together, with strong hearts," I said. She blinked at me several times, so I smiled to reassure her.

You can rely on me. I'm your big sister, after all.

My feelings must have been conveyed, as Charlotte's worried look soon turned to a stronger smile. "Indeed," she said. "I will do the best I can as well."

Brewing and Recovery Potions

“You have brewing class this afternoon, milady. Let us hurry and get you changed into your brewing clothes,” Rihyarda said.

Just as riding gear was worn before mounting one’s highbeast, brewing clothes were worn prior to making a potion. This was my first time wearing them, since I would always brew in my priest robes in the temple. These somewhat resembled the work clothes of scholars in that the sleeves weren’t long and frilly, and there was barely any lace that might get in the way of one’s duties. The biggest distinction, however, was the lack of a cape. Students instead wore scarves of their particular duchy’s color and fastened them in place with a brooch.

Once I was changed, I checked to make sure I hadn’t forgotten anything and then headed over to Philine, who was going to be attending the same brewing class as me. “Is everything ready?” I asked.

“Yes, Lady Rozemyne.” Philine pinched up her skirt and gave me a gentle smile. Her brewing clothes were hand-me-downs that Rihyarda and Ottilie had managed to source from among their acquaintances, but they were so well-made and so nicely embroidered that nobody would have guessed. “I’m happy to have such pretty brewing clothes. Everyone taught me how to mend them. I think I’m a bit better at sewing thanks to my time in the castle.”

“You certainly work hard at all that you do, Philine.”

“You should work on your embroidery like Philine does, milady,” Rihyarda noted.

“Indeed. On the fateful day when Dregarnuhr the Goddess of Time weaves our threads so...” I replied. It was a breezy response that essentially meant, “Maybe one day.” I cared more about transcribing books than embroidery, and I cared more about reading than transcribing.

I made my way downstairs.

“Apologies for the wait,” I said. “To the Small Hall we go.”

This was going to be my first time brewing in class, but I already had

some experience making rejuvenation potions, so I was largely familiar with the whole experience. For the most part, I was just amused to hear Wilfried talking about how excited he was to brew for the first time.

Brewing in the temple consisted of preparing ingredients at Ferdinand's instruction, cutting them up, throwing them into a pot, and stirring them all together with mana. I had not yet been allowed to make the high-quality rejuvenation potions that I used myself, so I had been making lower-quality ones and selling them to Eckhart and Angelica. This was basically work to me, so it was hardly something to be excited about.

"I have already been taught how to make rejuvenation potions by Ferdinand, so this is far from exciting to me. I would at least like to brew something else," I said. My retainers nodded in response, already aware that Ferdinand was educating me, but Roderick widened his eyes.

"You're already brewing, Lady Rozemyne?!"

"Ferdinand has been training me, since it is apparently an issue that I cannot brew my own rejuvenation potions. At the moment, I can brew four blends."

In an instant, all of my apprentice knights shot me strange looks. "Wait a moment, Lady Rozemyne. There are *four* blends of rejuvenation potion?!" they exclaimed. It seemed that only two blends were taught in the Royal Academy: the basic kind used by laynobles and mednobles, and the higher-quality kind used by archnobles. Only a research-obsessed mad scientist like Ferdinand would go beyond these, which explained why Eckhart and Angelica requested to guard me when I was making them and purchased them from me on the spot.

"I have learned to make a potion that replenishes a small amount of my mana and stamina, a potion that replenishes a larger amount of my mana and stamina, a potion that replenishes much of my mana and almost none of my stamina, and a potion that replenishes almost none of my mana but a great amount of my stamina," I explained.

Although, if we include the ones that Ferdinand makes, there are seven in total. There's the ultra-nasty potion that sacrifices flavor for effectiveness, the kindness-enriched potion that tastes better, and the divine potion made with blenrus from Haldenzel. I wasn't sure whether I should openly speak about those, however, so I kept them to myself.

"Seems like Uncle makes coming to the Royal Academy kind of

pointless...” Wilfried muttered.

“Perhaps in regard to lessons, but one must still attend the Academy to acquire one’s schtappe and become a noble,” I said.

“Plus, one can hardly socialize with other duchies outside of the Royal Academy. It is something of a shame, really, because the onus is quite exhausting...” Charlotte added with a sigh as she made her way to her written lessons in the auditorium. It seemed that the upcoming socializing season had made her really want to return to Ehrenfest. I understood how she felt; socializing was a pain.

“It’s not all bad, you know. I’m looking forward to meeting old friends and making new ones,” Wilfried said, emphasizing the fun parts of socializing. His supportive words brought a smile back to Charlotte’s face. I couldn’t let him beat me here; as Charlotte’s older sister, I needed to cheer her up too.

“Wilfried is correct,” I agreed. “Coming to the Royal Academy is the only way to access its extensive library and make friends with fellow bookworms. Not attending would come at too great a cost.”

“Rozemyne, try to think about something other than books and the library...” Wilfried said with a sigh. Charlotte nodded hard in agreement, but they were being unreasonable; what else would there be in the world if you took away books and the library?

“Sylvester has told me to make this year as peaceful as possible. You do *not* want me putting my all into socializing.”

Everyone had endured chaos last year due to my forming too many connections with royalty and top-ranking duchies. It was better for me to focus this year on maintaining those connections while peacefully dedicating my efforts to the Library Committee.

“In that case, I shall do all that I can to help you read your books,” Charlotte said.

“What a lovely and adorable thing to say! But fear not, Charlotte—as your older sister, I will strive to work hard with socializing as well.”

Charlotte’s eyes widened in surprise. “But, er... Sister... Why?” she asked. “You can go to the library while here.”

I nodded and then patted her arm comfortingly. “Do not worry, Charlotte. I am the child of an archduke, and your older sister. I shall fulfill the duties assigned to me.”

I couldn’t just hide away in the library and force all this painful work on my gallant little sister—that was why I would do my best to socialize as much as was necessary. It was a decision that I had just come to.

We entered the Small Hall to find that things were set up differently than in our previous lessons, no doubt so that we could brew properly. The frontmost wall was covered with a broad cloth, in front of which was a stand. Nothing was written on it yet. There were several tables, the frontmost of which had six modestly sized brewing pots set equidistant from one another. It seemed that we would be preparing our herbs in front of the professor, and given the limited number of pots, it seemed that whoever finished cutting first would win. The other tables were laid with boards, and at the center of each one was a measuring device reminiscent of balance scales.

We would simply be measuring out our herbs for the rejuvenation potions, cutting them on the board, and then mixing them in the pots. There was absolutely nothing hard about it, so I expected that everyone would pass right away.

“The brewing shall now begin,” Hirschur said.

Hirschur went on to explain how to use and clean the tools, among other things. I nodded along as she spoke, but Ferdinand had already drilled this information into my head, so my attention was instead focused on the cloth at the back of the room—the magic tool she was using. It was the one that Ferdinand had repaired. She touched it, and on its surface appeared the herbs we were going to use, how much of them we were going to need, and what we were going to do to make our potions. Judging by the shocked reactions from the other students, this magic tool was not especially common.

“I will only be using this magic tool for the first lesson,” she said. “Take care to write down the names of the herbs, their required quantities, and the brewing process. Those who finish may weigh the herbs and subsequently morph their schtappes into knives to cut them.”

With that, the other students all started taking notes. Wilfried and I didn’t need to write anything down, since this information was already covered in our study guides and such. Just seeing the herbs and their quantities listed on the cloth was enough for me to realize we were making the simplest rejuvenation potion.

I gestured toward the scales, prompting Wilfried to go first. He nervously measured out his herbs and then morphed his schtappe into a knife. I started measuring my own herbs when he was done, but when I glanced over to see how he was doing, my heart practically leapt into my throat.

“You’re about to cut off your fingers!” I cried, gasping when I saw his knife about to miss his herbs entirely. He was even worse than my male classmates back in my Urano days.

He blinked at me several times, then grinned. “Nah, it’s fine. You’re forgetting that this knife is a schtappe,” he said. Since schtappes were made out of one’s own mana, a knife made from a morphed schtappe couldn’t harm its owner—that is, unless they were cutting with the intent to harm themselves. I had been confused as to why we bothered to morph our schtappes when we could save our mana using a regular knife, but now I understood.

On second thought, it was fairly obvious. This class of archnobles and archduke candidates was basically a gathering of uber-rich boys and girls who had never sliced anything themselves before. It was easy to assume that most of them would stumble over something as simple as cutting herbs.

“It still makes me uneasy, even knowing that it won’t actually hurt you...” I commented.

“If you’re that scared, how about you go first? You’re an expert brewer, aren’t you?” Wilfried said, pursing his lips. At his words, all eyes gathered on me. I had drawn unwanted attention once again, but at least it wasn’t for anything serious this time. I could just show him how to cut herbs properly.

“I am hardly an expert; I am simply used to brewing rejuvenation potions,” I replied. Ferdinand was the true expert there. I pushed the scale for measuring herbs to the center of the table, took out my schtappe, and then chanted “*messer*” to transform it. “If you hold the knife like so and use your other hand to hold down the herbs, you need not fear cutting into your fingers.”

After offering some advice on the claw grip, I provided a demonstration. The onlookers oohed and aahed at my swift handwork, but it really wasn’t impressive at all; commoners did this basically every day while cooking.

“Cutting the herbs into similarly-sized pieces makes them melt into the mana at a more even rate,” I explained once I was done. I chanted “*rucken*”

to revert my schtappe and then brought my freshly cut herbs over to the brewing pot. Wilfried came along, as did the other students at my table; they were presumably curious about the actual brewing stage of making a potion. “Professor Hirschur, may I use the brewing pot?”

“I am a bit surprised at how exceedingly fast you were, but yes, you may. I imagine you know the washing methods, Lady Rozemyne?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“That will save me a bit of time, then. Attention, everyone! Lady Rozemyne will now be providing a brewing demonstration! Those of you who have never seen brewing before or do not feel confident from just writing down the process, step forward and watch!” she called, spurring the students to gather. I absolutely deserved praise for not shouting out, *“You’re a teacher; don’t try to save time by foisting work on me!”*

Knowing that everyone was watching made this especially difficult, but I was beyond the point of no return. I set my board on the table, took out my schtappe, and then chanted “*waschen*” to clean the pot. No longer did my spell flood the entire room with water; I was in perfect control of my mana.

“Perfectly done. Now the brewing...” Hirschur prompted.

After dumping the herbs on my board into the pot, I took my schtappe out again and chanted “*stylo*” to create a pen. I drew a circle around the edge of the brewing pot and then started to add a variety of sigils. Despite their name, magic circles came in plenty of shapes, whether they be triangles, hexagons, or something more complex; what mattered was the unique sigils representing the gods within them.

“Rozemyne, what is that magic circle?” Wilfried asked.

“It helps speed up the process,” I explained as I reverted my schtappe to its original form and then chanted “*beimen*” to turn it into a mixing stick. I had already learned to match my stick to the size of the pot, so it was the perfect size. All I needed to do now was stir the concoction until its surface flashed and the rejuvenation potion would be complete.

“Lady Rozemyne, I don’t believe time-cutting magic circles have been taught in class yet,” Hirschur noted.

“Oh, my apologies. It’s simply a force of habit now,” I explained. My arms always got tired from the endless stirring, so Ferdinand had taught me the secret trick of using time-cutting magic circles to speed up the process.

Now that I thought about it, today's lesson hadn't actually involved such circles, but it was too late for me to erase it.

"The magic circle Lady Rozemyne drew saves time by amplifying the mana pouring twofold, but those not accustomed to brewing will end up failing if they attempt the same. Everyone, pour in your mana at your own pace," Hirschur said. She then reduced her voice to a mutter. "Good grief... Are you not a bit *too* used to brewing potions, Lady Rozemyne? It is abnormal to use magic circles to accelerate the process, especially during one's first brewing lesson."

"Ferdinand taught me so that I could make my own potions," I replied. "That said, I am still unable to make the ones I need."

"As always, I find it hard to tell whether Ferdinand has a heart of stone or gold. A normal noble would not teach others potion recipes of their own creation simply out of goodwill..." Hirschur replied. She dripped a few drops of the rejuvenation potion I had made onto a magic tool that would measure its quality. I knew this because Ferdinand had used the same kind of thing before. "You pass in terms of both quality and effectiveness."

Alright!

I spent the rest of class teaching Wilfried the trick to brewing while almost having a heart attack whenever I saw a nearby student cutting right next to their fingers.

"Rozemyne, what's the trick to spreading your mana out equally?"

"Simply refrain from weakening the flow. It will decrease naturally as you tire, so either start with a weak flow or use magic circles to shorten the time as I do. I must warn you, though—using the time-cutting magic circle will drain your mana all at once, so I cannot recommend it to beginners."

I could tell the nearby students were listening in on our conversation, but it would be improper for me to give them help unsolicited. And as I pondered the situation, the bells signifying the end of class rang. I was the only student to pass. Mixing while spreading mana equally was surprisingly hard, it seemed, and nobody had brewed a rejuvenation potion that met the expected standard.

After dinner, we archduke candidates met with our retainers and began forming a list of questions concerning Drewanchel and socializing in general. Wilfried wrote to Sylvester, I wrote to Ferdinand and Elvira, and Charlotte wrote to Florencia. We were all covering the same things, more or

less, but Charlotte had suggested we send them separately to get more perspectives.

The knight guarding the teleportation hall was going to send our boards back to Ehrenfest. I gave them to our apprentice scholars, and as they went to deliver them, a wave of exhaustion washed over me.

"It's all over now, Sister. How are you feeling?" Charlotte asked.

"I'm more concerned about how *you're* feeling. Will you be well tomorrow? If you do not rest enough, you may collapse midway through the walk," I warned, recalling my own experience.

Tomorrow, the first-years would be traversing the Farthest Hall to obtain their Divine Wills. They were going to have their written lessons in the morning as a result, which meant our written lessons had been moved to the afternoon. We would instead spend our morning attending our practical lesson.

Charlotte giggled. "I would not lose consciousness over something as small as a bit of exhaustion."

"Still, archduke candidates have to travel a lot farther than laynobles," Wilfried noted. "You should get as much rest as you can, Charlotte."

She readily nodded at his advice, despite having acted so tough with me. *Somehow, I feel as though I don't wield the dignity and authority expected of an older sister. This seems quite dire.*

As I paused to consider how I could reacquire my lost glory, Charlotte peered down at me. "Are you feeling unwell after all, Sister?" she asked.

"I'm still quite fine. Now, on a more important note—as your sister, I need to—"

"I would very much like you to get some rest," Charlotte said, her indigo eyes practically dripping with concern. "At once, if possible."

Rihyarda put her weight behind Charlotte, stating that I should not be worrying my little sister, and so I was forced to retire for the night without any opportunity to resist. The holes in my canopy had evidently been sewn up while I was in class, as they were now nowhere to be seen.

I must have fallen asleep while thinking about how to regain my sisterly dignity, as the next thing I knew, it was morning.

We were going to be spending today's practical lesson making armor from feystones. It was closer to a protective bodysuit like a bulletproof vest than the full suits of armor knights wore that covered their entire bodies, but

it was crucial nonetheless. We would put ourselves at risk in times of danger without them, apparently.

“Rozemyne, do you reckon I should think up some really cool armor, like how I thought up cool schtappes?” Wilfried asked.

“The armor we make today is to be worn under one’s clothes; I don’t believe coolness will serve much of a purpose.”

“R-Right. Good... Good point,” he said, slumping over in almost excessive disappointment. His shoulders were drooping so much that I felt compelled to cheer him up. He must have been *really* invested in making cool armor, and while I didn’t really understand the fixation, it was much too awkward to leave him so depressed.

“Ah, but, erm... Fashion is about putting thought even into the unseen, so I think there is some merit in considering the appearance,” I said hastily.

“Putting thought into the unseen, huh?” Wilfried repeated. “I like the sound of that.” He cheered up in an instant and immediately started talking about cool armor. It seemed that he had come up with a few designs already, but none of them were able to be worn underneath clothes, so he needed to start from the ground up.

For once, I wasn’t the first person to finish our practical lesson—Hannelore was. She was apparently used to making bodysuits, since the people of Dunkelfelger wore them at all times. The archnobles of her duchy received passing marks soon after.

Getting the feystone to cover my body and then harden was simple enough, considering that it was the same technique as when one makes a highbeast. And since I wasn’t too fixated on its appearance, I passed in no time. Wilfried was still trying to decide on a design, which was fair enough. As far as I was concerned, he was free to take as long as he needed.

Roderick’s Wish

That afternoon, I had plenty of spare time on my hands, thanks to having already completed my written lessons. I saw the first-years off to the Farthest Hall and then began studying for the scholar course with Philine and Roderick, using the third-years’ study guides as a base. Judithe was serving as my guard, since she had also completed her written classes, while the other second-years were studying for their respective courses or working on their practical techniques with Wilfried.

“What will you two do once the second-year classes are over?” I asked Philine and Roderick when we reached a natural pause in our work.

“My practical lessons will take much longer than yours, Lady Rozemyne, but once I’ve finished them, I am hoping to gather stories from other duchies,” Philine said. She now had a better understanding of what questions to ask, and she had mostly overcome her fear of speaking to new people after spending so much time in the castle and the temple. Her grass-green eyes sparkled as she pictured getting even more stories than last year.

“That is nice to hear. I very much look forward to your efforts,” I replied. “And you, Roderick?”

Roderick slowly looked up from his studies, set down his pen, and then tightly clasped his hands atop the table. “There is something I must talk to you about, Lady Rozemyne. May I have a moment of your time when you are next able?” he asked. His dark-brown eyes were drawn but resolved, much like when he had declared that he would give me his name.

I tensed up without thinking and swallowed hard. I had once thought of taking Roderick as a retainer, and my future would change dramatically based on whether I had the resolve to accept his name.

“Milady, I ask that you first settle your heart well,” Rihyarda said quietly. I turned and saw that she was wearing a gentle smile. “Giving one’s name is of great importance, but accepting a name is equally consequential. Your feelings on the matter are vital.”

She must have come to the same conclusion as me upon seeing

Roderick's resolved expression. I nodded to her sage advice, but Roderick shook his head. "I do not intend to give my name at the moment," he assured me. "I simply wish to talk."

"About what, then?" I asked, unable to think of anything but the name-swearing. Roderick must have seen my confusion, as his eyes wandered about the room in apparent contemplation.

"I wanted to speak of why I wish to give my name and my thoughts on various matters," he said after a pause. "One of your retainers told me that, unless we have this conversation, you will not be able to decide whether to accept my name."

I instinctively looked over at Judithe and Philine, the former of whom paused for a moment and then whispered, "That would be Hartmut." It seemed that he was acting in the shadows again. Either way, it was still important for me to hear Roderick out.

"Rihyarda, prepare a room," I said.

"As you wish, milady."

"I would rather speak to you alone, Roderick, but I will need to bring my guards and attendants. Do forgive me."

"I understand that I warrant suspicion as a member of another faction," he replied.

While Rihyarda was off securing a room, I glanced down and started organizing the papers I had been studying from. My nervousness must have transferred to Philine, as she likewise began tidying up while glancing between Roderick and me.

I made my way to the room Rihyarda had prepared with Judithe as my guard and Philine as my scholar. Upon our arrival, I took the seat opposite Roderick and looked at him head-on. "What did you wish to speak of, Roderick?" I asked.

He stared at the floor for a moment and then looked at Philine, Judithe, and Rihyarda in turn. Eventually, his eyes settled on me. "Lord Matthias implored me to think carefully, and after doing so, I still wish to give you my name," he said. "Naturally, that is only if you wish to accept it. I know that you presently do not wish to accept any name. I have been told that I will only be a burden to you as a name-sworn."

I nodded in response, now even more certain that it was Hartmut he had spoken to.

“But I was also told that I should do my best to put my feelings into words,” he continued. “This is my only opportunity to speak with you, here in the Royal Academy, so... I was hoping we could talk.” He was speaking quietly and seemed to be choosing his words carefully. It was a stark contrast to his attitude the first time we had met.

Back then, he had come across as especially rowdy. Like a troublemaker.

Roderick had clearly been friends with Wilfried; I still remembered our first year in the winter playroom, when they would run around and play together. He was one of the kids who had thrown snowballs at me, and when borrowing teaching materials, I seemed to recall him picking karuta and playing cards over picture books. I could imagine the Ivory Tower incident had dramatically changed his life.

“I had such an incredible time during my first winter playroom,” Roderick began.

In the winter playroom, there had been toys the likes of which he had never seen before and sweets that were given out as rewards, regardless of one’s status. It was a study environment that allowed the children to compare themselves with their peers, and toys could be borrowed in exchange for new stories rather than money.

“At first, I was only interested in karuta,” Roderick continued. “Winning at karuta or playing cards was the only way for me to taste those delicious sweets, so I started to tell a story to you in hopes that I might be able to borrow them to practice more. Halfway through my story, however, I lost track of the plot entirely. I began searching for ways to conclude it and just continued making things up as I went along.”

“I recall. It was quite an amusing story, full of innocent ideas...” I said with a giggle, thinking back on how his eyes had desperately wandered all over the room as he thought the plot up on the spot.

“I was glad that you enjoyed the story and got carried away with making another, this time for the playing cards. I wanted to borrow them again the next year, so I asked my parents to tell me a number of stories over the spring. I truly looked forward to the next winter playroom.”

Roderick had also been excited for the autumn hunting tournament, when children would gather to play games before the winter playroom. It was then that, at the encouragement of some adults, they had started on their quest to find the Ivory Tower.

“We never got lost thanks to the guiding marks on the trees, but my father said that only the archducal family was allowed to enter the tower itself. I had no idea that our little adventure would end the way it did; I was just thrilled to be exploring the forest I wasn’t usually allowed to enter.”

Wilfried was charged with a crime for entering the Ivory Tower, as were the nobles who had prompted him. He had received only a light punishment in the end, so the nobles had received only a moderate punishment in turn, but Roderick’s life had changed dramatically nonetheless.

“As the son of a second wife, I was not treated very highly to begin with,” Roderick explained. “My age and sex afforded me a lot of chances to meet with Lord Wilfried, and in my father’s eyes, that was my only virtue. At times when I was close with Lord Wilfried, my father would smile and treat me warmly, but his smile vanished when I was distanced. It was as though he had become an entirely different person. I started to despair as he criticized my every failure—after all, he was the one who had pushed me to go on the adventure to begin with.”

Roderick’s father had wanted to have the option to enter either faction, but now he could no longer approach the archducal family. His contempt only intensified once word of my mana compression method started to spread.

“My days at home were spent in misery, and my heart sank deeper knowing that the winter playroom I was looking forward to was no longer somewhere I could freely spend time with friends. In the end, I spent my time reading books. Being alone was more bearable than trying to play games with others and enduring all the judgmental eyes on me.”

My only knowledge of what had happened in the winter playroom during my long slumber had come from Wilfried and Charlotte. Now that I had another perspective, it seemed that things had been quite harsh for the children of the former Veronica faction.

“That was when one of your guard knights handed me a book newly made for the winter playroom,” Roderick went on. “I was informed that you would have shown it to me yourself, had you not been attacked and forced into your slumber. And inside... was the story I told you.”

His eyes suddenly grew distant and teary. At the time, he had felt as though he no longer had a place in the playroom. My book had given him somewhere to retreat to.

“I was so happy,” he said firmly, his fists clenched. “I read it over and over and over again, and soon enough, I realized that my ramblings had been edited to properly function as a story. From that point onward, I started to focus more on the language of everything I read. I am now much better at constructing sentences, although I am still far from perfect...”

Rather than focusing on playing games in the winter playroom, Roderick had read the knight stories and picture book bibles, come up with new tales based on the ones Philine had gathered, and rewritten his own collected stories. It must have proven quite difficult for him, considering the lack of reading material available to him.

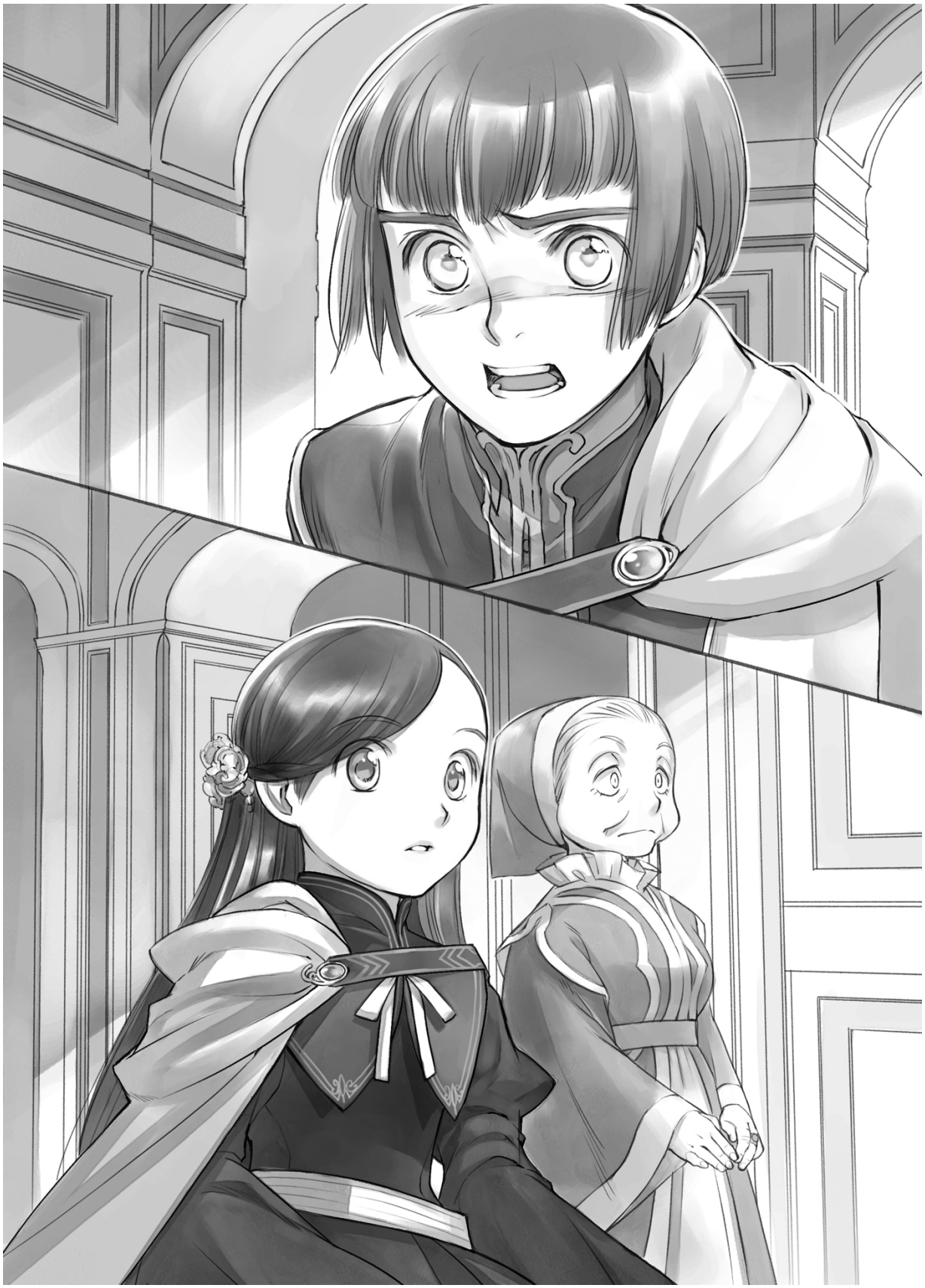
“I believe your efforts bore the most bountiful fruit,” I said. “The stories you brought to the Royal Academy last year were extremely well-written.”

“You praise the efforts of all, no matter their faction,” Roderick noted. “You also purchased the stories I wrote last year. On that day, I realized just how much I wished to serve you, but I was instead met with suspicion. As it stands, I am a member of the former Veronica faction who committed an unforgivable error—one that harmed the person to whom you are now engaged. I could leave my faction immediately upon coming of age and I still would not be trusted. Securing a position in your service was an unattainable dream.”

Roderick looked away from us and down at his clasped hands before forcing himself to continue. “I could not become a retainer, but Philine could. She was doing the same things as me, but she still achieved what I could not, despite only being a laynoble. I was overcome with envy and resented that I was not in your faction.”

Upon hearing this, Philine apologetically looked down at the floor. Her expression was clouded with empathy.

“I had come to accept that I would never be your retainer, Lady Rozemyne, but then Aub Ehrenfest restored my hopes. He told me that I could earn the trust I require by giving my name to you,” Roderick explained. He then looked me in the eyes and said in complete earnest: “If giving my name to you will make me trustworthy then I shall do it. Philine swore her loyalty after gathering stories, and I too wish to do the same.”



Roderick was now squeezing his hands so ferociously that his fingers had gone white. “Please,” he said, his scorched-brown eyes revealing his determination. “If I write a story so wonderful that you begin to want me as a retainer, will you accept my name then?”

I enjoyed reading the stories Roderick brought me; as far as I was concerned, he was already my vassal. My request to take him as a retainer had been refused, but if allowing him to swear his name to me would change that, I was willing to oblige.

I mean, it was Sylvester who said we can trust those who give us their names, right?

“I would like to accept your name, Roderick,” I said.

“Lady Rozemyne?!” he exclaimed, his eyes wide with disbelief.

“You have already been giving me that which I desire most. I will accept your name alongside your stories.”

“It seems to me that his name hardly even matters to you, milady...” Rihyarda commented, unable to hide her exasperation. In truth, she had a point—gathering stories was my main concern, and I trusted Roderick regardless of whether he gave his name to me.

“I will accept your name, but we must make our own preparations before we can accept you,” I said. “First, please discuss this carefully with your family.”

“There will be no need for that,” Roderick replied with a pained expression. “My life and my choices mean nothing to my family anymore.”

“Would your parents not warm up to you once you are connected to me? I assumed you could use that as an opportunity to repair bridges once burned.”

Roderick shut his eyes tight and rejected the idea. “My father is the reason Lord Wilfried cannot trust me. He cost me my happiness in the playroom and my chance to become your retainer. I am giving my name to earn your trust, not for the sake of my father or family. I could never forgive my father if something he said or did ever brought you misfortune, Lady Rozemyne. I ask that you allow me to leave my home upon receiving my name.”

Roderick asking to leave his family reminded me of when Lutz had wanted to run away from home in the past. At the time, Ferdinand had said that we needed to learn all sides of the story before making a decision; it

was possible that everyone involved was concerned for each other but failing to properly express their thoughts and feelings. It was a fact of reality that Roderick's father had hurt him through his actions, but that alone wasn't enough for me to draw a conclusion.

"Unlike with Philine, I do not have enough information to decide whether it is best for you to leave your family," I said. "I shall need to learn more during winter socializing."

Roderick seemed to deflate as though all the tension had suddenly escaped his body. He gave a careful nod and then smiled at me, his eyes set on the future. "I will make preparations for when I give my name in the meantime. I must first learn how to make a feystone engraved with my name."

By the time we had finished our discussion, the first-years had started trickling back into the dormitory, keeping their distance from one another to avoid any collisions. I could tell they were cradling something invisible in their arms.

"Return to your rooms at once," Rihyarda called to the first-years. "Take care not to bump into anyone."

Charlotte nodded with a proud smile and then climbed the stairs. The first-years would be spending the rest of the day in their rooms until their Divine Wills were absorbed into their bodies. It made me nostalgic for last year.

After dinner, which was much quieter with the first-years absent, I started deciding what I was going to do on my day off tomorrow. My plans would impact the plans of my retainers.

"I would like to go to the library, if possible," I said.

"Lieseleta and I were hoping to leave the dormitory to prepare for the tea party and future socializing events," Brunhilde noted.

Cornelius and Leonore asked to hunt feybeasts. "We need to prepare ingredients for the archscholars," they said. The duchies with few apprentice knights would apparently come together to get the ingredients that everyone needed. "We shall trust Judithe to guard you."

My retainers' collective message was clear: *"We have our own plans, so please sit quietly in the dormitory while we're gone."*

As I frowned, unwilling to give up on the library, Hartmut gave me a

smile. “Lady Rozemyne, might I suggest reading one of Lord Ferdinand’s books?” he asked. “I believe you would do well to study in your room. Alongside Philine, of course.”

One of Ferdinand’s books?!

I spun around at once to see Hartmut wearing an expression that essentially said, *“That settles it, then.”* I hated to play into his hands like this, but I couldn’t resist the allure of new books. I decided to spend tomorrow doing exactly as he had suggested.

The next day, after breakfast, my retainers immediately went about their business. Brunhilde and Lieseleta had finished their preparations and were already on their way out. “Lady Rozemyne, Lieseleta and I are off to socialize,” Brunhilde said as they headed to the door.

“Indeed,” I replied. “May fortune favor you.”

“Leonore and I will be hunting feybeasts for ingredients,” Cornelius said. They weren’t the only ones, though; several other apprentice knights were preparing to head off as well. Only the bare minimum necessary to protect Wilfried, Charlotte, and me were going to be staying at the dormitory. “Make sure to stand guard, Judithe.”

After my attendants and the apprentice knights had departed, Hartmut came over to instruct me. “I will give the book to Rihyarda,” he said. “Please return to your room, Lady Rozemyne.”

I waited for a bit, and soon enough, Rihyarda returned with the book that Hartmut had given her. Philine and I examined it closely.

“It’s so thin. I had thought it would be at least as thick as the book from Dunkelfelger...” Philine said. I was hardly surprised to hear her using that as a yardstick, considering that she had spent forever transcribing it. The new book was indeed rather thin, but it seemed lengthy enough that it would take me more than a day to finish.

“This here is a magic circle. I wonder if this book is about making magic tools...” I mused aloud. It took only a moment to confirm my suspicion, as the book went into great detail about the ingredients needed for certain tools and the quality those ingredients needed to be. It was even complete with illustrations of magic circles.

“This is written in Lord Ferdinand’s hand, so perhaps it is a compilation of his research results,” Philine suggested. She saw his handwriting often

while helping at the temple.

I nodded in agreement while continuing to thumb through the book. One section detailed the research of professors we had read about on the second floor of the Royal Academy library. Ferdinand must have made this for his own benefit.

“Lady Rozemyne, there’s something between the pages...” Philine said, pointing to a slip of plant paper that had been inserted into the book. It was easy to spot, since it was a different color than the parchment. A quick glance revealed it was a note from Ferdinand; in a shocking twist, he had written down what I needed to know to make the magic tools that would serve as the foundation of the ideal library I had spoken to him about.

“Let’s see here... ‘I made this magic tool for an indolent professor. It returns things you do not wish to lose back to you. If you add a time limit to the circle, it may be used to automatically return books following their due date. Study well and learn to add one circle to another.’ Wow. Ferdinand really is something else,” I concluded.

He had shot down my dream library as entirely unrealistic, but here he was searching for ways to make the more practical ideas possible. The fact that he had already designed the proper magic circle but was making me figure it out for myself was very much like him.

“I’ll do my best.”

I skimmed the book several times over with Philine, fiddling and experimenting all the while in an attempt to make the proper magic circle.

“We need to put Wind here if we want the book to move, right?” Philine asked.

“Look more closely. If you insert Wind there, it won’t activate due to the Life over here. But if we add Earth here, perhaps it will do something else entirely. What exactly should we do?”

It was difficult to make a new magic circle by combining the functions of two others. As second-years, we simply didn’t stand a chance.

“Do you understand this, Judithe?” I asked.

“Third-years don’t learn about magic circles that complex, so I’m basically in the same situation as you,” she replied, shaking her head and then taking a step back. She had given up so quickly that she almost reminded me of Angelica. It was a worrying development.

“Judithe, you should use your head more,” I said. “Let’s think about this

together. A magic circle that makes things travel automatically to specified places could prove useful during ditter."

"I don't think knights are supposed to be doing things like this..." Judithe grumbled. Still, three heads were better than two, so we brought her into our struggle. Unfortunately, it wasn't the magic spell to make things easier that I had hoped it would be.

"I would like to hear Hartmut's thoughts on this," I finally conceded. He had been selected as my retainer for being a skilled apprentice archscholar, so perhaps he would know. I had Rihyarda go call for him, but when she returned...

"Hartmut is absent, milady."

"Really? He didn't mention having any plans today..." I muttered. Philine nodded along in mutual uncertainty, but Judithe gave an amused smile. There was a knowing sparkle in her violet eyes.

"Maybe he's going to meet his lover," she said. "If she's from another duchy, this will be their first meeting in almost a year. So romantic!"

Come again?!

"Are you saying that he tricked me? That he got me to hole up in my room with a book so that he could go meet his girlfriend...?" I asked.

"Oh, no, no, no!" Judithe replied, waving her hands as she hurriedly backpedaled. "That was just what came to mind; I don't know whether it's actually the case. I just thought it would be funny."

"Now that you mention it, though, I recall that Hartmut refused to tell me who he plans to escort... Do you know, Judithe?"

"Sadly not. Hartmut is nice, has many friends, and speaks with the students of other duchies all the time in his search for information. It really could be anyone."

And today he's on a secret date...

I decided to lurk in the entrance hall, hoping to ambush Hartmut when he returned, but the apprentice knights soon came back from their gathering. They balked upon seeing me as soon as they entered the dormitory.

"Lady Rozemyne, has something happened...?" Leonore asked.

"Hartmut left in secret," I said, keeping my eyes glued to the door. "I imagine he is in the middle of a romantic meetup with his partner, so I am waiting for him to return. I shall make him tell me who she is."

“It gets really cold near the door, so you’re going to get sick if you keep standing around here. Could you at least wait in the common room?” Cornelius asked with an exasperated look as he tried to gesture me inside.

“I want to surprise him, so I’ll continue waiting here.”

“I see... I’ll go get changed, then.”

With that, Cornelius headed to the stairway. Leonore followed behind him, although she glanced back at me several times before she eventually disappeared from sight.

I’m going to find out his secrets, no matter what!

I stood in wait with my hands firmly on my hips, and soon enough, Hartmut returned. He saw me, blinked in what seemed to be faux surprise, and then raised an eyebrow. “Why, Lady Rozemyne, what are you doing here?” he asked. “Have you finished Lord Ferdinand’s book already?”

“Thought you could distract me to have a secret meeting with your sweetheart, did you? Who is she? Is it someone you dare not introduce me to?”

“You sound entirely like a jealous wife...” Hartmut replied with a chuckle. He then took out a bundle of paper, and the enticing aroma of parchment and ink caught me in a trance. He moved the papers to the right and my eyes followed. He moved them left, and my entire body was pulled with them. “I was meeting a scholar from another duchy,” he explained. “They had promised to transcribe something for me. Knight stories, to be precise. For my one and only liege. Does that cheer you up?”

Knight stories, for me? Oh, Hartmut truly is my most loyal vassal!

“It does!” I exclaimed. “Show them to me, please!”

I urged him to hurry, and in response, he handed the bundle to Philine. “You must be cold if you have been waiting here,” he said. “I suggest you read them in your room.”

“Naturally. Judithe, Philine—let us return at once,” I said. As I excitedly headed to my room, I saw Cornelius climbing down the stairs, freshly changed. “I shall be reading knight stories in my room,” I informed him.

“Wait until you’ve warmed up,” he replied. “Alright?”

When Cornelius reached the bottom of the stairs, I heard him call out to Hartmut. I glanced over, wondering what was going on, and saw a glimpse of Cornelius catching a feystone or some such that Hartmut had tossed to him.

And so, I started reading the knight stories from other duchies, having completely forgotten to ask Hartmut whom he had visited.

Dedication Whirling and Ordonnanz Brewing

“We have returned, Lady Rozemyne,” Brunhilde announced. She and Lieseleta had come back from the gathering of attendants while I was reading the knight stories Hartmut had brought me. It was a highly important meeting, during which attendants shared information on events between spring and autumn and discussed their plans moving forward. “This is for you—a letter of invitation from the music professors.”

The music professors’ attendants had evidently been there as well; they had given Brunhilde the letter she was now handing to me. It informed me that our tea party was going to be held three days from now. At first, I was a little confused that the date had been settled without my input, but Brunhilde explained with a troubled smile.

“It is already known to the professors that all of the Ehrenfest second-years have passed, so they assume you have no plans. It seems they grasp our own grades and studies as well. I must develop my skills further so that you may have an opportunity to refuse even professors next time...” she said, her lips pursed in slight vexation.

Ehrenfest had only started receiving invitations from professors last year, so there was no way we could turn them down. Even so, Brunhilde was determined to learn the dance that was Royal Academy politics, so it seemed safe to leave things to her.

“Lady Rozemyne, no other duchy had all of its second-years pass on the first day, so tales of Ehrenfest have become quite popular among the professors and other duchies,” Lieseleta said with a gentle smile. “We have garnered much attention for a variety of reasons. It has become common knowledge that all of our second-years have passed their written lessons, so I expect there to be even more opportunities for you to socialize.”

Brunhilde rested a hand on her cheek. “Will it not be Lady Charlotte who will be socializing more?” she asked. “Invitations will truly start to

arrive once socializing season begins, by which point Lady Rozemyne will have returned to Ehrenfest for the Dedication Ritual."

"In that case, I will need to socialize as much as I can before my departure, for Charlotte's sake. Such is my duty as her older sister," I declared.

Lieseleta giggled at my fiery determination. "Lady Rozemyne, little sisters enjoy their older sisters relying on them and recognizing their growth. Please do entrust at least some of the socializing to Lady Charlotte," she said. Her words reminded me of all the times when Tuuli would praise me and when she had relied on me when she wanted to meet Corinna.

"So an older sister must also praise their little sister and rely on them to encourage their growth...?" I muttered. "Becoming a wonderful older sister is quite the challenge. I just want to be someone she can rely on."

"Oh my. Well, I am sure you can prove how reliable you are by successfully finishing the tea parties with the professors, who need your presence in particular, and the book-sharing tea party with Dunkelfelger. Ehrenfest has almost never received invitations from professors and top-ranking duchies before."

I resolved to pour my all into my upcoming tea parties, eager to help Charlotte however I could, and then gathered my attendants and my personal musician Rosina to discuss meeting with the music professors. Sixth bell rang as we were deciding what to bring as gifts and which new songs to choose. Only one laynoble first-year showed up for dinner; the rest were still unable to leave their rooms.

"Lord Wilfried, Lady Rozemyne, we have received replies from Ehrenfest," Ignaz revealed. He had with him the letters he had received from the knight guarding the teleportation hall. Hartmut took them all, skimmed them, and then gave me only one.

"This one is addressed to you, Lady Rozemyne," he said. "This one is for you, Cornelius. It is from your mother."

Cornelius grimaced as he accepted the letter and started reading it. Soon enough, he was staring at the ceiling with his head in his hands; something headache-inducing had clearly occurred. Judging by his expression, Elvira was either instructing him to reveal whom he was escorting, or she had already worked it out through some devilish means.

After a moment, I gazed down at my own letter. It was from Ferdinand—a scathing response to everything contained within our reports, no doubt. But when I read its contents...

"It seems that you do not even know what the word 'peaceful' means. Learning it should be your greatest priority."

...I found there was hardly any berating whatsoever. Instead, there was simply a short list of instructions, telling me to keep my water gun under wraps until the time came when I could show him and to entrust all nonessential socializing matters to Charlotte.

Wha...? There's no scolding. He didn't lecture me at all.

I reread the letter over and over, checking repeatedly for a continuation. I had come to expect at least several pages criticizing my behavior, and yet there wasn't so much as a single harsh line. It made things even scarier.

"Hartmut, did you truly include everything in my report?" I asked. "Did you mention that I tore the canopy of my bed to pieces with my water gun...?"

"Did you receive a scolding?" he replied.

"J-Just a small one..." I said, hugging the letter to my chest so that he couldn't read it. I was getting more and more concerned.

Have I gone beyond the point of no return? Does he consider me not even worth scolding anymore...?

Ferdinand was the type of person to ignore those he didn't care about unless they were actively getting in his way. And when they were, he would mercilessly eradicate them.

Oh no. Oh no, no, no! This is way scarier than him getting mad at me! Nooo...

"Was the letter that severe?" Hartmut ventured. "You appear quite unwell."

"I'm fine," I replied. "I'm going to do exactly as Ferdinand instructs me!"

I'm going to behave! So please, yell at me, Ferdinand!

That night, my dreams were all about Ferdinand scolding me to death. It must have somewhat relieved my anxieties, as I woke up the next morning feeling refreshed.

As I made my way to the dining hall for breakfast, I saw some of the first-years coming out of their rooms with their Divine Wills absorbed.

Charlotte was still nowhere to be seen, but that made sense—archnobles generally needed more time than laynobles.

"Earthday alone wasn't enough for me either," Wilfried noted. "I needed to wait until noon on Waterday, so I expect she'll come down at lunchtime."

I nodded and then glanced at the staircase leading up to Charlotte's room. "We have whirling practice this afternoon. Is she going to be okay?"

"Of course," he assured me. "The most important thing for first-years is to watch the seniors practice, remember? Practice isn't that long anyway."

He had a point—archduke candidates of all years practiced their dedication whirling together, and since the senior students were prioritized, those in their first year spent very little time actually whirling themselves. During my first year, I had spent the entirety of my whirling classes watching Eglantine. Could anyone graduating this year even compare to her wondrous talent? I was a little excited to find out.

Of course, only archduke candidates participated in dedication whirling—others would focus on things like sword dancing or music.

Charlotte had safely absorbed her Divine Will in time to have lunch with us, and now she, Wilfried, and I were headed to the Small Hall. Several archduke candidates had already gathered when we arrived. Everyone was so used to the ways of the Royal Academy by now that they promptly separated into years and started practicing.

"Now then, the older students will demonstrate the fundamentals," the professor said. "First- and second-years, watch carefully."

I watched as the fifth- and sixth-years began to whirl, but nobody caught my attention like Eglantine had. The only archduke candidates I could recognize at a glance were Adolphine of Drewanchel and Rudiger of Frenbeltag.

Adolphine was performing as the Goddess of Wind. It was a very appropriate role for Drewanchel, but when I saw Adolphine whirl, I started to wonder whether she should have been playing the Goddess of Light instead. She was certainly more talented than the girl who currently had the part.

Meanwhile, Rudiger was performing as the God of Life. It seemed an odd decision to me, since the two weren't at all similar in appearance, but it was probably because Rudiger wasn't skilled enough to overcome the

duchy ranking barrier and whirl as the God of Darkness or the God of Fire instead.

The fifth-years were whirling a short distance away from the sixth-years and with very serious expressions. It was during one's fifth year that the roles for the graduation ceremony were finalized, so they were all working their hardest. Among them were Lestilaut of Dunkelfelger and Detlinde of Ahrensbach, who were aiming for the roles of the God of Darkness and the Goddess of Light, respectively—as expected of archduke candidates from greater duchies.

Lestilaut is a surprisingly good whirler...

His center axis was kept firm and straight; maybe he had trained a lot in Dunkelfelger. Detlinde, on the other hand, seemed... pretty average. Then again, maybe it was wrong of me to compare everyone to Eglantine.

After observing the older students for a bit, the third- and fourth-years began to practice as well. The first- and second-years continued to watch the older students practice until space opened up for them, much like last year.

"Good day to you, Lady Rozemyne, Lady Charlotte."

"Good day, Lady Adolphine."

When it came time for us to take a break, Adolphine approached with a smile. It was a move that attracted an unmistakable amount of attention—a sixth-year from a greater duchy had willingly addressed younger students of a mere tenth-ranked duchy. I was frozen to the spot, but Charlotte stepped forward and returned the warm expression.

"You sixth-years certainly are excellent whirlers," she said. "I found myself enraptured by your dancing."

"My my. If you continue to work your hardest, Lady Charlotte, this will all seem easy to you come your final year," Adolphine replied, regarding Charlotte with her amber eyes. "The key is to practice every day."

It was then that I remembered Charlotte had also been singled out by Adolphine during the fellowship gathering. I stepped forward in an attempt to block her from sight; as her older sister, I needed to protect her.

"Lady Adolphine, I see you are to perform as the Goddess of Wind," I said. "It occurs to me that this is the perfect role for an archduke candidate of Drewanchel, but given your talent, would you not also be suited to

perform as the Goddess of Light?”

“I appreciate your kind words, Lady Rozemyne, but in my heart, the Goddess of Light may be performed only by Lady Eglantine. I would not wish to besmirch the honor with my own whirling.”

That was an opinion I could understand completely—Eglantine really was perfect for the role. I nodded my agreement, which elicited a refined chuckle from Adolphine.

“How are your plans, Lady Rozemyne? Ehrenfest has displayed such academic excellence, I suppose you will soon be starting to socialize?”

“We have finished our written lessons early, but our practical ones will take us some time. And with Charlotte having been invited as well, I believe it will take a bit longer still,” I replied. The first-years were now working at a more reasonable pace, hoping to achieve and secure the reward for the highest grades, and Charlotte was doing her best to ensure that no unnecessary mistakes were made.

“Practical lessons certainly do take time, no matter how well one might prepare,” Adolphine said. “I similarly intend to finish mine as soon as I am able, but we can hardly work as the younger students do.”

Classes became more difficult with each year one advanced in the Royal Academy, and one received more tasks to complete, so older students began socializing later. Even so, Adolphine assured me that she would still manage to meet with me before I returned to Ehrenfest.

“I am looking forward to our meeting ever so much; there is much we must discuss,” Adolphine concluded with a smile and then departed. Detlinde, Wilfried, and Rudiger came over barely a moment later. It seemed as though they had been waiting for an opportunity.

“Hello, Lady Rozemyne,” Detlinde said with an exceptionally kind smile. “I intend to hold another party among cousins this year, if all stays well. I was hoping to welcome Lady Charlotte into our family here.”

“I would be delighted,” Charlotte responded with an equally radiant smile. “I have not yet had an opportunity to meet with my extended family.”

And so, the tea party among cousins was arranged. Much like last year, it was planned to be held once socializing began, which meant I would be unable to attend once again.

“My apologies, Lady Detlinde. I am expected to be away from the Royal Academy at that time,” I said. I considered suggesting that the tea party be

held a little earlier as a result, but before I could, Detlinde brought her eyebrows together in a show of disappointment and gave a heavy, regretful sigh.

“Oh dear. You are going to be absent once again? My disappointment is immeasurable, but your duties at home are quite important. Fret not—I will not force myself upon you. You can still attend, Lady Charlotte, can you not?”

“I-Indeed...” Charlotte replied; then she gave me a questioning look. My role in the temple meant that I was going to be absent during socializing season—everyone knew that, and it was obvious that Detlinde had no intention of changing the date.

I was a little worried for Charlotte, considering that Detlinde was kind of annoying and the sort of person who did spiteful things for seemingly no reason... but apparently Detlinde was just like Veronica in how she cared for her family. She seemed to perceive Charlotte as kin, and with Wilfried in attendance too, there was presumably nothing to worry about.

“Erm, Lady Rozemyne...” came a quiet voice.

“Break time is now over! Students, return to your places!” the professor shouted. Hannelore was drowned out entirely, and she gave a quiet “aw” as we were urged to return to our practice. We exchanged waves and smiles but that was it.

I wish I could have spoken with Hannelore about the Library Committee instead of talking to Detlinde...

It was time for the younger students to practice whirling. I was already somewhat experienced from my lessons in the temple, so in my case, the biggest challenge was trying not to give a serious prayer to the gods. Thankfully enough, I managed to avoid causing a massive scene and ended up passing. The professor praised my technique, but it was really all thanks to Ferdinand and Rosina teaming up to train me on a daily basis.

I spent the next morning studying for my classes next year and working on the item-returning magic circle—with a hint from Hartmut. After lunch, I changed into my brewing clothes and made my way to brewing class.

“Today, you will be learning to brew an ordonnanz,” Hirschur announced. “Nobles use this magic tool more than any other, no matter their status, so you would be wise to prepare many.”

Hirschur displayed the steps necessary to brew an ordonnanz on the white cloth on the wall. Everyone simply copied them down; nobody was surprised this time, since she had used the same tool when we were making our rejuvenation potions. I had never brewed an ordonnanz before, but I personally didn't need to write out the instructions—they were the same as in Ferdinand's study guides, which meant I had already transcribed them when organizing our textbooks.

Just as Wilfried and I started preparing to brew, there came an unexpected request from Hirschur: "Lady Rozemyne, demonstrate the process, if you would."

"Professor Hirschur, I have never brewed an ordonnanz before."

"Oh, I am sure you'll be fine," Hirschur replied, snatching up my ingredients in one swift motion and taking them to the front. I couldn't brew without them, so I conceded and followed after her. "Now, you may proceed."

I could feel the other students watching me as I attempted to brew an ordonnanz according to the displayed instructions. First, I turned my schtappe into a pen, drew the required magic circle on some parchment, and then had Hirschur check it for any mistakes. I then cleaned the pot I was going to be using with waschen, added a feystone taken from a feybeast bird of the Wind element, and started stirring it with my stick.

"Ah, it melted..." one student uttered as they stared into my pot. The feystone was breaking down and turning into a yellow gel-like substance.

"Once it has completely melted," Hirschur said, "add this magic circle."

I held up my parchment for all to see, as if on cue, and then dropped it into the pot. The parchment melted in an instant, and the circle was burned into the yellow gel. I continued stirring and pouring in my mana—the key was to endure even as your arms grew tired.

Soon enough, the gel started to harden. The clumps stuck to the pot were gradually drawn together until my stirring created a lone clinking sound, and a bright flash signified that the process was complete. Awed noises came from the gathered crowd.

"Would you like to see?" I asked as I took the ordonnanz—which looked entirely like a yellow feystone—out from the pot and placed it where everyone could observe it. It was funny to see the other students edging closer and closer for a better look.

“There are three key factors for success: ensuring the magic circle is correct, adding the magic circle only once the feystone has fully melted, and continuing to pour in one’s mana at a steady pace until the ordonnanz is done,” Hirschur said, speaking very much like a professor.

I returned my schtappe to normal and swiftly cleaned the pot. Only once the students had returned to their seats to try the process for themselves did Hirschur address me again.

“Lady Rozemyne, let me see if your ordonnanz can be properly used. Send it to me.”

I tapped the ordonnanz with my schtappe and said, “Success”; then I sent it on its way. Everything worked as intended—the yellow feystone turned into a white bird, went over to Hirschur, and then repeated my message three times before returning to its original shape.

“Very good,” Hirschur said.

“Do recall that I am not your assistant,” I replied. “What would you have done had my brewing failed?”

I was experienced enough when it came to making rejuvenation potions, but never before had I brewed an ordonnanz. I was fortunate to have succeeded, but if my attempt had ended up being in vain, it would have been a complete waste of time. She could have just done the demonstration herself.

Hirschur raised an eyebrow. “What chance was there of you failing such a beginner brew when you are so skilled in maintaining a steady flow of mana? Furthermore, if you are Ferdinand’s disciple, that more or less makes you my disciple as well, does it not?”

“Um... I do not believe so,” I replied. An outcome like that was far from what I wanted; I certainly had no intention of spending entire nights debating magic tools, nor did I have the stamina for it.

“Not to mention,” she continued, “creating my own ordonnanzes for every class would leave me with far too many. Is it not most logical for my skilled disciple to perform the demonstrations?”

“As I said, I am not—”

“In case you were not aware, I am intending to compile the results of my research into a book, which I shall then give to the library...” she interrupted with a smile.

Wha...? A new book?!

Hirschur’s red lips curved into a grin as my words failed me. It was something of a villainous grin—hardly one you would expect to see on a teacher.

“I have decided that I will show the book to my disciples first,” she added innocuously.

This is like a deal with the devil... I need to think this through carefully. I certainly do want to read this book, but do I need to read it before anyone else? I mean, it can’t be easy being Professor Hirschur’s disciple. Okay. I can resist. I can prove my patience. Stay strong. I need to stay strong.

“Ngh... I-I am not your disciple,” I protested, turning down Hirschur no matter how much it broke my heart doing so.

I... I did it. I refused the devil herself. Someone, praise me!

But the devil would not give up so easily. She looked down at me with surprise and rested a hand on her cheek. “Lady Rozemyne... If you serve as my assistant for the rest of class, I will lend you the book first as a special gift.”

If you need an assistant that much, bring one to begin with... was what I wanted to say, but what actually escaped me was the complete opposite. “I am not your disciple... so I will serve as your assistant only during class.”

And so I spent the rest of class checking magic circles with Hirschur. It was strange—despite not having wanted this in the slightest, something had compelled me to agree.

“Huh. You’re Professor Hirschur’s assistant now?” Wilfried asked me.

“Only for today,” I retorted, pursing my lips with annoyance as I checked the magic circle he had drawn. “This particular sigil is backward. Redraw it.”

The Music Tea Party and the End of Classes

It was the day of my tea party with the music professors. Most students were still working toward finishing their classes, and the shenanigans with Eglantine and Anastasius last year were still fresh in people's minds, so I was going to be the only one attending this time. It was technically a show of much-appreciated consideration on the professors' part, as they simply wanted to hear my new songs before they were debuted at other tea parties and did not want to burden me.

We were going to be debuting songs that Rosina had arranged, and we were bringing some pound cake with us, much like last year. Charlotte had even taught me how to bring up certain topics of conversation. "You are the only one in Ehrenfest who can ask things of the professors," she had said. "We are counting on you." I would not make her regret it.

I'm a big sister she can rely on, after all.

"Welcome, Lady Rozemyne," Pauline said upon our arrival. My attendants lined up our gifts as we exchanged greetings, while Rosina began preparing her harspiel.

Once our greetings were complete, Pauline offered me a seat; then she took a sip of tea and demonstratively bit into a sweet. I did the same with my pound cake, proving it was safe to eat, and thus began our tea party. I glanced over at Rosina to indicate that she would soon need to start playing and then introduced the new song.

"This is a song dedicated to the Goddess of Water," I said.

"Your songs are all dedicated to the gods," Pauline remarked casually. "Do you make no others?"

"As I was raised in the temple, the gods are what I am most familiar with," I replied with a smile. In truth, this applied more to Rosina, who had actually been raised in the temple and was the one arranging the music and

composing the lyrics.

Rosina began playing on cue. It was a song I had based on a classical composition, and it was so relaxing that I started to wonder whether it might have some kind of healing effect.

“In a few years’ time, do you think you might transition into making love songs?” Pauline ventured. “You were engaged to Lord Wilfried in the spring, correct?”

“The engagement was settled, but how does that lead to me producing love songs, I wonder? It is hard for me to imagine the future...” I replied, which earned giggles from the professors. I allowed their amusement to wash over me.

Rosina could possibly write love songs if she one day fell in love, but with how dedicated she was to her instrument and the amount of time she spent in the temple with me, I could see her easily passing her prime without any romantic happenings whatsoever.

Still, I can’t make the love songs myself...

I could always attempt to make my own love songs, but I thought it was best to avoid such a risk. Ferdinand had described what I thought to be a heartwarming love story as perverted, so I could see myself unknowingly debuting a bawdy tavern song during what was supposed to be a refined tea party. Such a blunder would impact the reputation of not just me, but also Ehrenfest on the whole.

“In any case, Ehrenfest’s grades are certainly on the rise,” Pauline said. “Your grades last year surprised us all, and once again, those in your year have passed all their tests on the first day.”

“I hear that Ehrenfest was the only duchy to have any students pass the sociology exam,” another professor remarked.

“Even the laynobles of the lower years are performing admirably with their instruments,” Pauline noted. Laynobles tended to receive poor marks in music due to the varying quality of their tutors and instruments, but it seemed that Ehrenfest had raised the skill floor among its lower years. “Your duchy’s laynobles say it is all thanks to you, Lady Rozemyne. Whatever did you do?”

I gave a slight smile. “I simply suggested that we prioritize bringing all of our students to a certain level of competency, which we achieved by having archducal music instructors teach the children in the winter

playroom and the dormitory. The achievement is not purely my own, however—it was Aub Ehrenfest who approved it, and my siblings Wilfried and Charlotte who made it a reality while I was asleep."

From there, in order to avoid any further interrogation, I guided the discussion elsewhere. I used a line that Charlotte had given me and asked whether my songs were spreading through the Sovereignty. The professors' eyes gleamed with excitement as they explained the circumstances of the music scene.

"Oh, indeed. They have spread at a shockingly fast pace," Pauline replied. "It must be because they are focused on Prince Anastasius and Lady Eglantine."

"They can be heard at tea parties of all natures, and we have been invited to several just to play them," another professor added.

"Your song dedicated to the Goddess of Light is especially popular. Many adore that it tells of Prince Anastasius winning Lady Eglantine's heart, and it spreads readily alongside stories of their romance."

Anastasius had shocked the Sovereignty and the top-ranking duchies by desiring Eglantine more than becoming king—and again when he declared they would support Sigiswald as royals rather than seek the throne for themselves.

"Those who were supporting Prince Anastasius had only managed to sputter words of confusion upon witnessing him choose Lady Eglantine over all else," Pauline said. "As for Prince Sigiswald, it has apparently been decided that Lady Adolphine will become his first wife."

Sigiswald had escorted a middle duchy's archduke candidate during his graduation and then married her as his second wife to begin with, meaning he was yet to take a first wife. Now that Eglantine was marrying Anastasius, he needed an archduke candidate from a greater duchy in order to become king. Adolphine had apparently been selected for the role.

"After all, most women the prince's age are already married," another professor intoned.

"Many were surprised to see Prince Anastasius surrender the throne, but even more were simply relieved that conflict has been avoided," a third added.

Sigiswald and Anastasius were both sons of the king's first wife, with similar mana quantities and generally similar ages. Both had previously

been seeking the throne, so most had feared a great war when it came time for succession.

"Prince Hildebrand is the son of the third wife and is much younger than the other two princes, so he was raised to be a vassal to begin with," one professor noted.

"I do hope the succession continues smoothly without incident," Pauline said, sounding rather worried. The other professors made small interjections of agreement. In my opinion, it was hard to imagine there being any problems when Anastasius had willingly stepped down and Hildebrand was never even considered for the throne.

"Are there any other matters you are concerned about?" I asked.

"The biblical fundamentalists in the Sovereign temple *have* been a little..." one professor began before trailing off mid-sentence. "But, well, that is only the temple. Their protests are of no consequence."

"Indeed. The words of the temple hold very little weight," Pauline said with a refined sip of tea, as if washing away their needless concerns. "We nobles need only listen to other nobles."

"Splendid results, Lady Rozemyne," Hartmut said with a joyous expression when I returned to the dorm and listened to a report from Philine and my attendants. The information I had learned was apparently of enormous value to Ehrenfest, as our lack of connections with Sovereign nobles had made acquiring Sovereign intelligence near impossible.

"Given that you were raised in the temple, Professor Pauline was likely probing to see if you were a biblical fundamentalist," Brunhilde noted. "It seems to me that she was relieved you did not respond whatsoever."

"Erm, what's a biblical fundamentalist?" I asked, confused. "I don't think I've heard the term before."

It seemed that I wasn't alone in my bewilderment—there was an uncomfortable silence until Rihyarda gazed up, as if digging through her memories.

"I do not know the precise details, but I believe they are part of an organization that proclaims the bible to be the ultimate authority in all matters and that the king should similarly obey its teachings," she said. It had apparently come into existence while royalty was preoccupied with the civil war, and its aim was for the temple to have a great deal more authority.

“If you do not know about it despite being raised in the temple, Lady Rozemyne, then it surely has nothing to do with Ehrenfest. You need not pay these fundamentalists any mind; they are not even nobles, after all.”

And thus ended our discussion about the matter.

“In any case, I will gather the information collected tonight and report it to Ehrenfest,” Hartmut announced.

Lieseleta turned to me. “If you pass your practical lessons tomorrow then you can finally start going to the library again, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Indeed,” I replied. “Failure is not an option.”

This afternoon we had more brewing lessons, and these would decide whether I could go to the library. I changed into my brewing clothes and went to the Small Hall. It appeared that Hirschur once again intended to use her magic tool, as a white cloth was spread against the wall.

“Now then—today, we are learning how to make a proposal feystone,” Hirschur said while projecting the method onto the cloth. “These are going to be necessary both when proposing and upon receiving a proposal. You will all need to know how to do this for the future, so take care when making them.”

The quality didn’t matter this time, since this was only for practice, but a proper proposal feystone had to be the best possible feystone that one could make. It would need to have as many elements and as large a mana capacity as one could manage, and the quality needed to be as high as was possible for a feystone with the divine color of one’s birth season. Once it was ready, the feystone was dyed with one’s own mana and the elements of one’s partner were added. This process was largely unnecessary when a person shared all the same affinities as their partner, but in cases where your partner had an affinity that you did not, it was necessary to use feystones of that element in your brewing.

“The goal today is to learn,” Hirschur said, “so add one element that you lack, no matter your plans for the future.”

But I don’t lack any elements...

The final step was to add the words of your proposal such that they would appear on the feystone. It was similar to the engraved wedding ring my mom had worn back in my Urano days.

I had plenty of experience dyeing feystones with my mana, so I

completed that step in a snap and moved to the front table with the brewing pots. Compared to dyeing a feystone for my jureve, dyeing one for class was simple.

“You’ve finished dyeing it already?” Hirschur asked with surprise, her purple eyes sparkling. She received the blue feystone dyed with my mana, brought it close to her face to check, and then whispered, “It truly is dyed...”

“The feystone is small and not of a particularly high quality. I don’t see why it would have taken me very long...” I said.

“Oh, it should have taken you quite a while, under normal circumstances.”

I set up a yellow feystone for elemental purposes and a parchment with words on it beside the pot. Given that I had all of the elements, for the purposes of class, I prepared a Wind feystone.

“What words will you be putting in, Lady Rozemyne?” Hirschur asked and excitedly reached for the parchment.

“I’m sorry to disappoint, but they are nothing that special,” I replied. It was just a common phrase—so common, in fact, that it was pretty much a standard go-to. As a woman, it was generally safe to go with something like “To my God of Darkness” or “I wish to be your Goddess of Light.”

Hirschur scrunched up her nose with disappointment upon seeing my trite choice. “Lady Rozemyne, if you do not choose words that would move a man’s heart, I cannot give you a passing grade,” she said.

“What?!” I exclaimed. “But this is just practice! Finishing the feystone should be enough for me to pass, shouldn’t it?”

“No. You have plenty of time, and since you are already engaged, I would suggest thinking of a proposal that you might give to Lord Wilfried.”

Excuse me?! She wants me to come up with sweet nothings right here and now?!

“I wish to witness your skill with the pen,” Hirschur continued. “A task such as this must be easy for someone as well-read as you. Lady Elvira’s book was filled with many wondrous turns of phrase.”

Gyaaah! No way can I admit that I skimmed over all the love scenes and proposals because I couldn’t understand all the divine euphemisms being thrown around! Someone, please! Give me a wondrous proposal to use!

For the first time in a practical, I was completely frozen, unable to even

move my hands. This task was a lot harder than any of the brews Ferdinand had forced me to learn.

Wh... What should I do?! "I love you" or "My heart is yours" seem like reasonable alternatives, but I can't confirm they're actually okay in this world without speaking to Ferdinand first!

Such phrases may have been orthodox back on Earth, but in this world, I had no idea how they might be interpreted. I was aware that lengthy euphemisms and poetic allusions were all the rage here, but that wasn't much help when I needed to come up with something on the spot.

"That is quite a deep frown, Lady Rozemyne."

"I don't think you should be asking a student like me to think up a proposal."

"Might I suggest you consider what kind of proposal you yourself would wish to receive? Perhaps it might prove useful," Hirschur said, more or less cackling at my predicament. I decided to follow her advice.

Hmm... Maybe "I want to make you miso soup every morning"? Or "I want to make a library just for you."

I ran my ideas by Hirschur, who rejected them on the spot with a look of complete bafflement. "Lady Rozemyne, what is this 'miso soup' of which you speak?" she asked. "Is it a common breakfast food in Ehrenfest?"

"Not in Ehrenfest, but I wish to eat it someday."

Hirschur gave a heavy sigh and shook her head. "I now understand where your interests lie, Lady Rozemyne, but do you think such things would move Lord Wilfried?"

I suspect he doesn't know what miso soup is, and it seems unlikely he would get excited about receiving a library, so... no.

"Did you not suggest I come up with proposals to suit me, Professor Hirschur?"

"Ones that suit you and that might at the same time move Lord Wilfried. Show some effort in learning to please men."

As someone who had never even had a boyfriend, this was a very big ask. Had I been one of those teens with immense girl power who made boys go gaga with every other word, I probably would have gotten more dates back on Earth, and Shuu wouldn't have made fun of me all the time. People always said the same things to me: "Boys like girls who can change to suit their tastes, and you don't do that at all. You've got too much pride. You

charge down your own path way too much. Nobody can keep up."

Honestly, the most me-like proposal out there would probably be: "I'll make you like me. Get ready to be corrupted."

Too much pride, huh...?

"Would men like a proposal that sounds more humble?" I asked. "Perhaps something like 'please dye me in your colors'?"

"Oh my, my, my!" Hirschur's eyes sparkled with what seemed to be pure amusement; she looked a lot like Elvira when she was latching on to a romance story. "You are quite the precocious child, aren't you, Lady Rozemyne? I can understand—you are of an age where you wish to act like an adult—but you should save such words for when you have come of age. For now, go with the phrase you proposed originally."

For when I come of age...? Don't tell me it means something obscene. Should I file this under the list of things Ferdinand would get mad at me about?

"Professor Hirschur, would this be a phrase that Ferdinand would scold me for were he to learn about it?" I asked timidly.

Hirschur paused in thought for a moment and then smirked. "Oh, worry not—Ferdinand will never see these words," she said. "Proposals are given only to one's partner, after all."

So I'm only safe because he'll never see it... which means he absolutely would get mad at me!

"You are almost out of time, Lady Rozemyne," Hirschur cautioned. "Do you not wish to pass today?"

I snapped back to reality and quickly returned to brewing. I wanted to accuse her of wasting my time with this proposal business, but I swallowed my complaints and took out my schtappe. I had mixed elements when making my jureve, so I completed the brewing itself without issue. Golden words appeared within the dark-blue, bead-shaped feystone.

"You pass, Lady Rozemyne."

Yes! Library, here I come!

"Wilfried, I passed," I announced upon returning to my table. "I can go to the library now."

"That was fast. I'm still struggling to dye this thing..." Wilfried said while glaring at his feystone.

"That may be because you're approaching it as you would brewing. For

a feystone, it’s more efficient to add as much mana as you can all at once.”

When it came to dyeing feystones, the amount of mana used was crucial—beating down the feystone’s resistance was a lot easier when you overwhelmed it with a ton of mana, and this ended up being more efficient than a slower approach. Laynobles without much mana had essentially no choice in which method they used, but the archnobles and archduke candidates here could probably handle going faster.

“You could’ve told me that earlier, Rozemyne. I’ve already used a lot of my mana.”

“In that case, you may have to spend today doing nothing but dyeing the feystone,” I said. “If you do not dye it completely, then it will gradually start pushing out your mana, so take care to not waste your mana entirely.”

“Mana gets pushed out...?” came a surprised question from the nearby students. They had only ever used magic tools to dye feystones, which were of such poor quality that they’d turn to dust just from sitting in the palm of my hand, so this information was completely new to them. In truth, I hadn’t known either before Damuel told me.

After all, I was told to dye stones right where I gathered them.

“All at once...” Wilfried muttered. He was focusing on the feystone in a way that made it clear he was pouring mana into it. Hannelore and Ortwin, who were sitting with him for this class, likewise wore serious expressions as they regripped their feystones.

“Done!” Hannelore announced excitedly. She was the first to finish—she no doubt had as much mana as you would expect from an archduke candidate of a greater duchy—and she showed me a feystone that was as red as her eyes. “It is all thanks to your advice, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Your own skill and mana capacity is what allowed you to succeed,” I replied.

“Oh, no. I am not particularly skilled when it comes to using my mana, so without your advice, I would most likely not have finished anytime soon.”

I was glad to have helped my friend, and I gave her some tips for brewing while I was at it. I wanted her to pass as soon as possible so that we could work together in the Library Committee.

I ended up talking with Hannelore and giving her advice until our brewing class came to an end, which made Wilfried pout. “Don’t you have

any tips for me?” he said.

“I do have one—you should join the Library Committee as well.”

“Just what kind of tip is that?!”

Incidentally, I sent a letter asking Ferdinand what “please dye me in your colors” meant. His reply was three pages long and tightly bound in packaging that marked it as confidential.

I see... So it’s a rather direct way of inviting someone to your bedroom for you-know-what. Lewd indeed. Hirschur told me to use it for my actual proposal, but I don’t think I will.

I Want to Do Library Committee Work

Library, O library! I'm finally freeee!

On this most glorious of mornings, Brunhilde helped me put on my Library Committee armband—all while groaning about how poorly it suited my outfit—and then I made my way to the dining hall.

"Let us go to the library at once," I said.

"Unfortunately, you must wait until tomorrow when you have retainers available to accompany you," Cornelius replied, refusing me instantly. It seemed that today was ditter practice, and all apprentice knights were going to be participating as part of their practical lessons. "Please spend today in your room with Philine. You will not have any guards this morning, so do not leave until we return for lunch. Leonore will return in the afternoon, but even then, one person is not enough for you to go to the library. You may venture only as far as the common room. Is that understood?"

I responded with an obedient nod; Cornelius's dark eyes left no room for disagreement. I understood that my selfishness simply wouldn't fly when it came to apprentice knights attending an important class, but still. It kinda sucked.

And after I worked so hard to pass all my classes... Tch.

"Lady Rozemyne, it was for times like this that Lord Ferdinand gave you books," Hartmut noted. "Might I suggest reading them today and studying magic circles and tools? You will need to learn both in order to construct your perfect library."

"You're as wise as ever, Hartmut."

There was no helping that I couldn't leave the dorm, but I could at least read the book that Hartmut received from Ferdinand. Excitement coursed through me and my heart throbbed at the thought of laying the groundwork for my dream library.

"You managed to complete Lord Ferdinand's task flawlessly before, Lady Rozemyne, so I am confident you will succeed again," Hartmut said. Indeed, I had technically completed the task of combining the two magic

circles into one, using the book as guidance. If everything was correct, books that weren't handed in by their due date would return to the library automatically.

And I worked extra hard to make sure they return to their proper place on the shelves too! Although I did need Hartmut to walk me through about seventy percent of the process...

Hartmut had said that I was expecting a little too much out of a single circle, but this was supposed to be my perfect library—I couldn't just quit when things got tough. Plus, combining several circles into one had been my task in the first place; I was just pushing that a little further than expected.

"Now, milady... It's time for your new book."

I waited in my room after breakfast, and soon enough, Rihyarda came over with the book from Hartmut. She set it on my desk, in front of both Philine and me.

"What book are we reading today, I wonder?" Philine mused aloud. "Oh, Lady Rozemyne. There is another note wedged between the pages."

It was from Ferdinand. Apparently, by embroidering a slightly modified version of the tools used to quiet voices in the temple onto some carpet, one could give it sound-dampening qualities.

So this task involves embroidery too...

Philine must have noticed my frown as she gave a few words of encouragement, saying we should work hard since it would be lovely to read in a quiet environment. She had continued transcribing books and gathering stories in the Royal Academy while I was away for the Dedication Ritual, and she had been surprised by how loud and busy the library became once final exams approached.

"The library is generally occupied by those of the lower-ranking duchies, but there were constant battles for the carrels and study guides," Philine recalled. "It made it quite difficult for me to be there."

As a laynoble, Philine was at the bottom of the totem pole, so she would instead take the books to the dormitory and transcribe them there while I was absent.

"I had the deposit money that you gave me and even brought Judithe so that I would not be in danger carrying the books back to the dormitory," she continued. "The laynobles of the bottom-ranking duchies were not so

fortunate, however; they had no choice but to study in the carrels, which put them in a terribly rough situation."

The library Philine spoke of sounded entirely different from the one I knew. I was aware that things got busy there, but not that it was chaotic enough to warrant having a guard knight.

"There would be less fighting over carrels if one could take out books for free, but..." My voice trailed away. All the disorder that Philine had described was because the students were too poor to borrow the books they needed. We could remedy that by removing the deposit, but this would result in there being fewer books available on the shelves. Resolving the problem seemed difficult—if not impossible—without producing enough books that people could always get the ones they wanted.

I wonder when I can start spreading the printing industry... It's hard to say without observing Drewanchel and the Sovereignty first.

No matter how much I thought about it, there wasn't much I could do for the Royal Academy library. Supplying mana to Schwartz and Weiss was about it.

"Lady Rozemyne, is something wrong?"

"No, not at all. Let us read."

This magic circle wasn't particularly hard to make; I simply needed to change the area of effect for the sound-dampening and that was that. Hartmut had definitely given us the books in the wrong order, and it was as I contemplated this that Judithe came to get me for lunch. Her morning classes had ended.

Oh... It's not that he messed up the order—he gives me the books based on how long he thinks it'll take me to read them. Which means... Ferdinand must be the one pulling the strings here, not Hartmut.

I had a feeling that the books were divided into three groups: those that would take me half a day, those that would take an entire day, and those that would take several days. It was the same way he had divided up the documents for Hirschur.

He's treating me the same as Professor Hirschur! I'm actually kinda shocked...

I spent my afternoon practicing the harspiel and studying for next year and then excitedly headed to the library the next day—while wearing my armband, of course. Judithe and Leonore were coming along as my guard

knights, Hartmut and Philine as my scholars, and Rihyarda and Lieseleta as my attendants.

“Milady returned.”

“Reading books, milady?”

Schwartz and Weiss walked over to greet me, and I stroked the feystones on their foreheads to resupply them with mana. Solange’s blue eyes widened when she saw us, and she approached as well a moment later.

“My. You certainly are early...” she said. “You truly never fail to surprise, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Professor Solange, Schwartz, Weiss—I have finished my second-year classes and will try to come to the library as many times as I can before the Dedication Ritual.”

“This is even earlier than last year, is it not?” Solange asked.

I nodded in response. Last year, circumstances had prevented me from passing highbeast creation right away, but there had been no such issues with my practical lessons this time. Next year, however, I was going to be taking both the scholar course and the archduke candidate course. I expected that it would take me a lot longer to gain access to the library as a result.

“I wanted to come to the library as soon as possible,” I said. “I have Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes to deliver. When shall we change them?”

During the Archduke Conference, the Sovereignty had apparently expressed some concern over whether Ehrenfest would be able to handle making the shumils’ clothes. Ferdinand was satisfied with our results, though, so I trusted they would suffice.

“Milady. Amazing.”

“New clothes.”

Getting clothes from their new master was apparently very important to Schwartz and Weiss. I could somehow sense that they were excited.

“I wish to borrow a room in the library so that I may change Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes. I understand that it is proper for their master to do this in their own quarters, but I fear that taking them outside will result in another incident like the one last year,” I said. It was better to prevent problems before they occurred.

Solange looked around and then smiled. “I can lend you my office if we schedule for before the students begin to arrive,” she said. It warmed my

heart; she had refused my request last year, so it seemed that our bond was deeper now.

“When would be a good time?” I asked. “Lieseleta, do you have a preference?”

“Me?” Lieseleta said, taken aback.

“Indeed. You worked immensely hard on embroidering their outfits. Is it not natural that you should be there when we change their clothes?”

Lieseleta began contemplating the matter. Seeing her dark-green eyes pierce the empty air as she frowned made her look very much like Angelica when she was thinking of ways to grow stronger.

“Your other retainers and I are most likely to be free in the afternoon three days from now,” she eventually replied. “Professor Hirschur does not have a class then either.” I was amazed not only because she knew Hirschur’s schedule, but also because she had the forethought to know that Hirschur would simply abandon whatever lesson she was teaching otherwise.

“That day will do,” Solange said. “I will also be free then.”

And so, the matter was settled.

“Professor Solange, regarding our plans for a tea party in the library—Lady Hannelore has said that she will be free in the mornings starting next week,” I said. “Would that work for you?”

“That is soon enough to not be a problem. As you can see, we have barely any visitors,” she replied, laughing as she looked over the empty reading room.

“In that case, we may do it early next week. I suppose it would be best for us to meet after Schwartz and Weiss are changed; I wish for Lady Hannelore to see the new clothes as well,” I said. “Ah, I’m just so excited. I cannot wait for the two of us to serve on the Library Committee. Behold—my armband.”

I showed off the band on my arm, which Solange regarded with a curious expression. “You said a Library Committee member is someone who assists with library work, correct?” she asked.

“Yes. We will assist you when things get busy here, as they did toward the end of last year.”

My time spent helping at the library and prompting Ferdinand to send out all those reminder ordonnanzes had been more fun than I could ever

describe. I was looking forward to doing it again this year, but Solange met my swelling excitement with a look of concern.

“I’m truly grateful for your enthusiasm, Lady Rozemyne... but the time you are here is when we have the fewest students. There will be nothing for you to do.”

What a nightmare! She’s pretty much saying she doesn’t need the Library Committee!

Still, I understood what she was saying—the library only started to get busy *after* I returned to Ehrenfest for the Dedication Ritual. There really wouldn’t be much for me to do right now, when there were so few students around.

“You are doing more than enough by supplying Schwartz and Weiss with mana,” Solange said. “I could not bother an archduke candidate to do any more.”

I slumped my shoulders. As much as I wanted to help out as a member of the Library Committee, Solange had turned me down. Persisting any further was equivalent to threatening her with my status, and that was the last thing I wanted to do.

Upon seeing my disappointment, Hartmut knelt down to whisper to me. “Were you not going to ask what manner of magic tools are used in the library? Perhaps improving them could serve as one of your duties in the Library Committee.”

“Hartmut, I thank you ever so much,” I said, looking up with newfound enthusiasm the moment I heard that. There were still ways for me to do committee work fit for an archduke candidate without getting in Solange’s way. “Professor Solange, are there any magic tools in the library that you feel need to be renewed or changed?”

“Why do you ask?” Solange replied, resting a hand on her cheek.

I puffed out my chest. “Because I intend to make a library of my own one day, and to that end, I want to know how this one is managed.”

“Oh my, your own library? That’s such a grand and wonderful dream.” Solange chuckled and then told me all about the library’s magic tools. There were several in addition to the lights that pulled students from their reading hypnosis when it was time for class—in fact, there were even magic circles carved into the building itself to make it the perfect environment for books.

What the heck?! That’s amazing!

According to a book I had read during my Urano days, preservation was a massive issue in stone monasteries and churches. Papyrus was cheaper than parchment but would rot or go moldy within a number of years, so those overseeing their collections would need to either rewrite these texts received from afar on new papyrus every few years or have them transcribed onto parchment. Storing books was also an issue because they couldn't be placed against the buildings' stone walls; otherwise, moisture that gathered on the stone would damage the books. Lining the walls with wood paneling had consequently become a necessity.

In this world, however, all of these problems were solved in an instant using a single magic circle.

"I regret that I cannot show you the building's magic circles directly, but there is a book about magic circles in the royal palace's library," Solange continued. "Furthermore, I seem to recall the Sovereignty's treasure vault similarly using magic circles to control the humidity and temperature."

Sounds like Sovereign magic circles are super high tech. Ehrenfest could learn a thing or two from them.

Then again, considering that those magic circles all required mana to maintain, I understood why Ehrenfest would struggle to copy them. Simply losing a few nobles would be enough to make them entirely unsustainable.

"Running the library is far more manageable with Schwartz and Weiss," Solange said. "They've already taken charge of carrel usage and the lending out of our reading materials, which was simply too much for one person to oversee with everything being done by hand." It seemed that there were a lot of things she hadn't been able to do when she was running the library on her own. Hearing that made me really want a Schwartz and Weiss of my own for the Rozemyne Library.

"I am in the middle of researching a magic circle to make books return automatically on their due dates," I explained. "I simply need to decide where on the book is best to place it."

"That is quite a convenient idea, but putting a magic circle onto every book would require an exorbitant amount of mana. I am wholly confident you could maintain that many, but I do not believe I could."

It would take a sizable quantity of mana to attach a circle to each book and then ensure it ran properly. They would need to be improved.

"In that case, are there any other magic tools you would suggest,

Professor Solange?”

“Perhaps the tool we spoke of previously—the one that would speak in Lord Ferdinand’s voice. He played such a key role in getting students to return their books last year. I understand that he will not always be free to help, so a magic tool with his voice would prove quite useful.”

Magic tools for recording voices already existed, but Solange would never normally have the chance to request a recording from Ferdinand. Still, seeing her regretful expression confused me a little—I agreed that it was impressive how many students had responded to his message, but surely she could use somebody else’s voice instead.

“Would a professor of the Royal Academy not suffice?” I asked. “I am sure Professor Rauffen’s voice would achieve the same effect.”

“The students are already familiar with the voices of all the professors; it is hard to imagine anyone being even nearly as effective as Lord Ferdinand.”

“Everyone certainly did come running... Very well. I shall ask him.”

There’s a chance he might refuse, but then maybe I could ask Angelica for a recording from Stenluke...

With that settled, we headed to Solange’s office so that I could retrieve the feystones Ferdinand had given me. Solange no longer needed them now that I was able to come to the library.

“These feystones were a great help,” Solange said. “Please do thank Lord Ferdinand for me.”

“Yes, I will. And speaking of which... are you familiar with a ‘gramps’ figure?”

“‘Gramps’?” she repeated. “No, I am not aware of anyone who is addressed as such.” I had figured that she would know, considering that this was a matter related to the library, but apparently not.

“When I supplied mana to the Grutrissheit in the hands of the Mestionora statue on the second floor, Schwartz and Weiss said it would please this ‘gramps’ person, whoever they are. It absorbed quite a bit of mana,” I explained.

Solange looked down in thought. “A magic tool even older than Schwartz and Weiss, perhaps?”

“Hm?”

“This library has many magic tools, more than half of which are no

longer kept running. One of them may be the ‘gramps’ they spoke of...” Solange muttered. She gazed toward the back of her office before sighing and shaking her head. “Unfortunately, there is much I do not know about this library and its history. As a mednoble, my role here was simply to assist the archnobles... and their abrupt disappearance meant that I never properly succeeded them. There are many things that I know only in part, that I may be mistaken about, and that I do not know at all.”

Archnobles carried out very different duties than mednobles, and their execution had occurred with so little warning that they had not properly trained any successors. A single mednoble didn’t have the mana required to supply the magic tools that had previously been supported by several archnobles at once, so at the moment, only the bare minimum were being kept running.

“I may learn more when the Sovereignty thrives again and we are sent archnobles who will allow me to enter their rooms,” Solange said, her eyes lowered sadly. She then looked at me and forced a smile. “Now then, enough of that. You may enjoy reading at your leisure, Lady Rozemyne. That is why you are here, no?”

I gave the feystones to Rihyarda and then returned to the reading room with Solange. The moment I opened the door, my eyes widened in surprise—the previously empty reading room now had around ten people inside. They had just arrived, it seemed, and they were just as surprised to see us.

At the center of the group was none other than Prince Hildebrand, whom I had assumed would be staying in his room at all times. He blinked his bright purple eyes at us several times and then looked around, making his blue-tinged silver hair sway to and fro. “I came because I was told there are no students in the library at this time of year. What are you doing here?” he asked.

Hildebrand had apparently sneaked here under the impression that nobody would notice him—which made him the best prince ever, as far as I was concerned. I could only hope that he would continue growing into a bookworm.

“Do you not need to be attending your classes?” Hildebrand asked. “You are... an archduke candidate from Ehrenfest, correct?”

He remembers me? Even though we’ve only met once?! Wow!

Not only was Hildebrand a bookworm—he was exceptionally smart as

well. I couldn’t believe he remembered me after seeing me just once at the fellowship gathering. This was my second year at the Royal Academy, yet I still didn’t know the names and faces of all the archduke candidates. I could remember the ones among my classmates at most, but even then, I was sure I would forget a few during my absence for the Dedication Ritual.

“I passed my lessons early specifically so that I could read in the library,” I said. “I intend to come here to read on a daily basis, but I shan’t interfere with your business, Prince Hildebrand. I would ask that you pay me no mind and enjoy your reading.”

We had met by coincidence, and the last thing I wanted to do was interfere with this young prince’s reading. I wanted him to go and read more. More more more. And in the future, when he grew up to be a bookworm, I would want him to increase the library’s funding and purchase more books to fill its shelves.

After greeting the prince, I swiftly turned away from him. “Schwartz, where might be the documents for improving magic circles and producing magic tools?” I asked. “Weiss, please guide Prince Hildebrand.”

“Milady’s books. Over here.”

“Understood, milady. Guiding Hildebrand.”

I followed Schwartz and my attendants up to the second floor, where I then began reading. I was focusing on the documents on magic tools, and it was then that I realized that the majority of the new research papers had Hirschur’s name on them.

She’s something of a problematic professor, but I can see precisely why Ferdinand embraces her as his teacher. Maybe I should ask her about the magic tools too.

Professor Hirschur’s Laboratory

After spending my morning looking over several documents, I decided that I should consult Hirschur. They were pretty complicated, and I couldn’t understand a lot of what was written.

“Lieseleta, when might we have an opportunity to visit Professor Hirschur?” I asked, remembering that she had committed Hirschur’s schedule to memory for the sake of planning out Schwartz and Weiss’s changing time.

“You wish to go to her laboratory, Lady Rozemyne?” she asked with a troubled and somewhat resistant look. “For what purpose?”

“I wish to discuss the library magic tools that I am considering with her.”

Lieseleta looked down at the floor for a moment, deep in thought, and then looked up at me again. “In that case, it would indeed be best to go to her laboratory. However, I suggest we do this before Schwartz and Weiss are changed. Once her attention is focused on research, Professor Hirschur will pay no mind to accommodating our wishes.”

I responded with a grave nod. Hirschur had a history of getting so absorbed in her research that she abandoned her classes, so I could easily see her abandoning us too. I asked Lieseleta to schedule things so that we could see her as soon as possible; I wanted to see whether my improved magic tools and circles were correct, and while I was there, I wanted to ask Hirschur if she had any convenient magic tools that would assist me in running a library.

“You met with royalty again, Rozemyne?! What did you do?!” Wilfried exclaimed out of nowhere at dinner. My mind was so preoccupied with magic tools that it took me a moment to even process what he had said.

“Um... The royalty’s magic tools?” I asked. “You mean Schwartz and Weiss?”

“Lady Rozemyne, he means Prince Hildebrand. You met him at the

library this morning, remember?" Philine prompted.

"Oh, right!" I smacked a fist against my palm in realization. "We exchanged greetings."

Cornelius peered down at me with an exceedingly concerned expression. "Rozemyne, don't tell me you forgot..." he groaned.

"Fear not—it had merely fallen into the corner of my mind where things that I do not wish to remember end up."

"Isn't that what people call forgetting?" Cornelius muttered. I really hadn't forgotten, though; the information had just taken a short while to come back to me, since I didn't really care about it.

"I did nothing but greet him," I assured everyone. "He was there in secret, so I did not wish to bother him. He had aimed for a time when no students were present, and I made it clear that I intend to visit every day from now on, so I do not expect to see him again." There was no way a prince who wanted to remain in the shadows would come to the library when he knew I was going to be there.

"I seem to remember you saying something similar last year, and yet..." Wilfried mumbled, his brow furrowed.

"Flutrane and Heilschmerz heal in their own ways," I replied. He was comparing last year to this year, even though Anastasius and Hildebrand were entirely different people.

"You somehow managed to see the prince who said that he wouldn't be leaving his room at all. I have no idea what might happen next."

"We may meet again, or we may not—it all depends on the prince," I said with a shrug. As far as I was concerned, it was a waste of time to consider the matter any further; no matter how much I tried to avoid trouble, it always seemed to find me eventually. "More importantly, we have made plans. It has been decided that we will change Schwartz's and Weiss's clothes three days from now, during the afternoon. This time, we need not take them outside of the library. I wish to bring some helpers, prioritizing the girls who assisted with the embroidery."

"Sister, may I come as well?" Charlotte asked, her indigo eyes beginning to sparkle; she had assisted with the embroidering in the castle too. "I have finished all of my written classes, so I will have time in the afternoon."

"Of course, Charlotte."

We naturally couldn't bring too many people, so we centered the group

around Charlotte, me, and our retainers, then chose the other girls while making adjustments based on their schedules.

“Lady Charlotte, I embroidered as well.”

“I wish to come as well, Lady Brunhilde.”

As I watched everyone eagerly form the group, Lieseleta quietly came to my side and reported that she had arranged a meeting with Hirschur. “It seems she has time tomorrow morning. She would like to introduce you to another student then as well. Her disciple.”

“Understood,” I replied. “Let us go to Professor Hirschur’s laboratory tomorrow morning.”

“And remember—please refrain from speaking of the clothing matter for the time being...” Lieseleta warned. I nodded in response.

The next day came, and I headed to Hirschur’s lab in the scholar building. I had with me the books from Ferdinand and the magic circles I had created, since I wanted to ask her about how to improve them.

Philine and Hartmut were carrying the documents, Brunhilde was bringing a simple tea set, and Lieseleta had a cleaning magic tool for some reason. Cornelius and Leonore were following as guards. Once we reached the door, Lieseleta announced our arrival as my apprentice attendant.

“Professor Hirschur, Lady Rozemyne of Ehrenfest has arrived.”

“Professor,” came a male voice from inside. “They’re calling for you.”

“Well, you’re closer, aren’t you?” came Hirschur’s response. “Open the door.”

It seemed the two of them were arguing. Soon enough, the door creaked open, and a boy stuck his head out. He had disheveled black hair, and his brewing clothes were covered in dust. The look on his face exuded a sense of profound sleepiness, and he just appeared to be kind of dirty overall. I reflexively grimaced, but it all made sense once I saw Professor Hirschur’s laboratory.

There were rather large tables lined up against the walls, each of which was fully covered with tools and mountains of documents. There were papers mixed with food scraps on the ground, which gave me the impression that a particularly tall mountain of paperwork had fallen over at some point in the past. Only the table square in the middle of the room was clear, and I could guess that was because they were brewing there. It was

neatly organized so that nothing was mixed unnecessarily.

“Do come in,” Hirschur called from inside, but Lieseleta stopped me before I could even take my first step.

“Professor Hirschur,” she said, “this room is not fit for visitors. Did you not say yesterday that you would clean it such that Lady Rozemyne could enter without shame?”

“You are right,” Hirschur replied without an ounce of guilt. “That is because this is not a room for visitors; it is a laboratory.”

Lieseleta gave a sigh of disappointment, muttered that this was why she hadn’t wanted to bring me here, and then turned her attention back to Hirschur. “I ask that you put any documents you need on the tables. As Lady Rozemyne’s attendant, I cannot allow her to enter a room like this,” she said, taking out an egg-shaped magic tool with a smile.

The expressions on both Hirschur’s and her disciple’s faces changed in an instant, and they immediately rushed to gather all the scattered papers on the floor.

“Lieseleta, what magic tool is that?” I asked.

She answered with a smile that it swallowed up everything in a specified area to clean it. One would normally dump all the dust that gathered on furniture onto the floor, then suck it up all at once—since everything on the floor was seen as garbage.

“This is the first tool we use for preparing long-abandoned rooms for use,” Lieseleta continued. She then used it, and the entire floor was cleared in an instant.

Of course, the tables were now an even bigger mess than before, owing to Hirschur and her disciple’s hurried attempt at cleaning up, but that wasn’t Lieseleta’s concern. Trying to organize the now precariously tall stacks of documents would take an immense amount of time, so she was turning a blind eye to them.

“I ask that the two of you at least make yourselves presentable,” Lieseleta said as she and Brunhilde brought in the sweets and tea set. Hirschur’s stomach growled when she saw the food; she apparently took all her meals in her laboratory, when she ate at all.

“I would rather not use my mana for anything but research, but very well,” Hirschur conceded. She used waschen to clean herself and her assistant in an instant—almost as if to distract from her stomach rumbling

—then she offered us our seats while reaching for a rejuvenation potion.

“I would appreciate an introduction,” I said, shooting a glance at Hirschur’s assistant as I sat down. His eyes were locked on the food.

“Oh my. Forgive me,” Hirschur said with an amused smile. She then introduced me to her newest disciple: Raimund. He was second only to Ferdinand in skill and had gained Hirschur’s attention during brewing classes last year, where he had been putting his all into brewing with as little mana as possible. “Ferdinand was a genius when it came to ideas, inventions. Meanwhile, Raimund is only a third-year, but he is a genius when it comes to modifications. If you wish to make improvements to your magic tools, Lady Rozemyne, I believe conversing with him will be most productive.”

The disciple knelt before me. “May I pray for a blessing in appreciation of this serendipitous meeting, ordained by the harsh judgment of Ewigeliebe the God of Life?” he asked, using the standard greeting for meeting someone for the first time. I gave my permission, and the light of a blessing flew. “I am Raimund, an apprentice medscholar from Ahrensbach. Nice to meet you.”

In an instant, the expressions of my retainers changed. Everyone took defensive positions, with Cornelius moving between Hirschur and me protectively. “Professor... your prized disciple is an Ahrensbach student?” he asked.

“Yes. Yes, he is. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Are you unaware of what has been happening between Ahrensbach and Ehrenfest in recent years?”

“No, I am fully aware. What is your point?” Hirschur asked, narrowing her eyes and urging Raimund behind her in an equally defensive gesture.

Cornelius glared at Hirschur, his fists tightly clenched. “Are you not ashamed to call yourself Ehrenfest’s dormitory supervisor?”

“I may be from Ehrenfest, and I may have been assigned to be the duchy’s dormitory supervisor, but I am a Royal Academy professor whose citizenship rests in the Sovereignty. All professors move to the Sovereignty so that we may raise skilled students for the sake of not one particular duchy, but Yurgenschmidt as a whole,” Hirschur said, her face stony and her purple eyes gleaming. “That is why it does not matter where my disciple hails from, Cornelius.”

“But Ahrensbach tried to kidnap Lady Rozemyne...”

“Good grief... I cannot tell whether you are stubborn for your age or simply shortsighted due to your youth. It is the duty of a teacher to nurture the remarkably talented among our students. We truly do not have much time in our short, transient lives to grow, and refusing the now for a more convenient later is the same as crushing one’s potential.”

Hirschur looked over my still on-guard retainers and then gave a dramatic sigh. “You speak so confidently and proudly about the political situation, but politics are ever-shifting and unreliable; they can change over a matter of years. It is more important to focus on those with talent, which can actually be relied on.” She laced her fingers together on the table and stared directly at me. “The clearest example is Ferdinand—when I took him as my prized disciple, the Ehrenfest students moaned to no end about what a terrible mistake it was. Lady Veronica even sent venomous replies to each of my weekly reports. And yet, a mere ten years later, what remains of those politics?”

Hirschur had raised Ferdinand as her disciple while defending him from Veronica’s hatred. He should have become a once-in-a-generation scientist, but instead, following his graduation and around the time of his father’s death, he was sent to the temple. Hirschur had worried that his talents would waste away there, but Ferdinand eventually returned to noble society and even began raising his own disciple.

“No one can truly predict how politics will change in their lifetime. Lady Rozemyne, had I bowed to the wisdom of the time and shunned Ferdinand, it is likely that you would not even exist as you are right now,” Hirschur continued flatly. She raised those with talent based on their results and her own gut feelings, paying no mind to political drama, and she had spent her life living according to that ideal. “I will repeat to you all the same words I gave to Lady Veronica: I am a Sovereign noble and a professor of the Royal Academy. Ehrenfest does not have the authority to decide whom I raise as my disciples and how I raise them.”

Moved by the thought that Hirschur had protected Ferdinand back in the day, I reached out and tugged on Cornelius’s sleeve. “Professor Hirschur is right, Cornelius. Professors may choose whomever they please as their disciples, and at the same time, we may choose to be on guard against Ahrensbach students. We all have our reasons for doing things.”

Cornelius gave a curt nod and stepped back, although he refused to lower his guard for even a moment.

“Oh my, it seems my tea has started to cool down...”

Hoping to lighten the mood, I sipped my tea and ate one of the sweets we had brought, then gestured for Hirschur to help herself. She popped a cookie in her mouth and then passed one to Raimund before reaching for the plate of crepes.

Raimund wasted no time in devouring his cookie. He then picked up and ate another, and another, and another, his blue eyes sparkling all the while. His movements were graceful, since he was a noble, but he was going through them as ravenously as a starving orphan.

“Still, to think you would come to speak with me, Lady Rozemyne...” Hirschur said, mentally preparing for our conversation as she ate a ham-and-vegetable crepe. I continued sipping my tea as I watched them chow down. This laboratory really wasn’t good for one’s health; I could see exactly how Ferdinand had ended up as he was now.

“I would like for you to teach me everything about magic tools,” I said. “I am in the process of making some to be used in libraries.”

“Could you perhaps be referring to the magic tool for playing voices that Solange has spoken to me about?” Hirschur asked. It seemed that Solange had already sent ordonnanzes to various researchers in the hope of getting the magic tools she wanted.

“My goals are broader than just recording magic tools,” I replied. “I would also like to improve existing magic tools so that they are more convenient to use. Furthermore, I created a magic circle of my own after reading books from Lord Ferdinand. Could you check it for me to make sure it works?”

Raimund gazed up from the crepe he had been given with wide eyes and exclaimed, “Books from Lord Ferdinand?!” He then clapped a hand over his mouth. He had made such an outburst despite how on guard my retainers were; it was only natural that he had drawn everyone’s attention.

Hirschur shook her head with a bemused grin. “Raimund has been dedicating himself to improving the magic circles and tools that Lord Ferdinand left behind,” she said, explaining for him. “It was he who modified the voice-recording magic tool that Solange wanted so that even a mednoble could use it.”

Raimund was keeping silent because we were already on guard against him, but he was staring at the books in Hartmut's arms, practically begging to read them. His eyes were shouting, "Please, please, please!" And who was I to ignore the cries of a fellow bookworm?

"Hartmut—"

"No." He cut me off with a smile. "These are Lord Ferdinand's research results. We cannot show them to someone from another duchy without his permission."

I slumped my shoulders as though I were the one being rejected and then held out the paper containing my magic circle to Hirschur. She paused eating—which was very noticeable, considering that her hands had been moving almost nonstop as she reached for this and that—and skimmed my work. After a moment of careful observation, she rubbed her temples with her fingertips.

"Lady Rozemyne... What in the world is this?"

"A magic circle to make books return to the library automatically after their due date."

"It's unusable," she said with an exasperated expression. I had thought it was sound in theory, but it appeared to be headache-inducing.

"What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"Nothing. It's just... unusable. You truly are Ferdinand's disciple. Nobody will be able to use magic circles designed with archduke candidate levels of mana in mind. This is neither practical nor realistic," Hirschur concluded, making it clear that my design had too many unnecessary components. "Why did you cram this all into one circle? If you put in Life then you will inevitably need Earth, which just makes a whole mess of things."

"The task Ferdinand gave me was to fit everything into a single circle."

"I suppose learning the theory for that would prove useful, but..." Hirschur trailed off and started tapping her temple as she handed the circle to her disciple. "Raimund, modify Lady Rozemyne's circle such that you can use it. You may use this opportunity to show her the basics of circle modification."

Raimund glared at the circle for a bit and then muttered, "I'm impressed you jammed so much into it..." before beginning his modifications. I made sure to watch his hands carefully as he worked. "The fundamental principle

behind improving circles is to simplify. Thus, we want to divide this particular circle into two circles—one to return the book to the library when its return date has passed, and another to move it to its place on the shelves."

"Why two?"

"Because mana is wasted otherwise," he explained. "As long as the book is returned to the library, Professor Solange can handle the rest. If she has mana to spare, she may use the circle for returning the book to its shelf, but if not, she can simply choose not to. Think of this as separating the essential functions from the quality-of-life ones. Because this circle is based on your exceptionally large mana capacity, Lady Rozemyne, it will end up useless for someone like Professor Solange."

"That is certainly true."

"The reason so many tools fell into disuse following the civil war is because many of them require so much mana that only royals or archnobles have the capacity to use them. That is why I believe functions should be divided—so that, when necessary, even mednobles and laynobles may use the tools," Raimund continued. He then also isolated the theft-blocking circle. "Making this a separate magic circle will mean we don't need Earth and Wind here."

He was simplifying the circle piece by piece. For a beginner like me, it seemed that keeping my magic circles as simple as possible would help minimize errors.

“You can reduce the mana requirement by making the circles less complicated and selecting the brewing ingredients more carefully,” Raimund said. “For example, I think you could save on mana for the magic circle that returns books to the library if you write it on the moving paper you invented in Ehrenfest.”

“Why do you know about that, Raimund...? I thought we only shared the verification paper with the Sovereignty and Klassenberg...” I said, blinking.

“Everyone knows about it,” he replied, looking at me with confusion. “Professor Gundolf was raving about it during class. He wants to research it himself, he said.”

“Who is Professor Gundolf?” I asked cautiously, unsure how this information was flowing through the Academy.

“Drewanchel’s dormitory supervisor,” Hirschur answered for him. “He’s a scientist friend of mine and a good rival. Hm... Given that Gundolf was showing interest, using Ehrenfest paper and verification paper as a mixed brew might result in something interesting...” Her gaze shifted to me; then, her lips curled into the smile of a mad scientist. “Lady Rozemyne, please do sell me some Ehrenfest paper and some verification paper.”

“As you are a Sovereign noble, I cannot sell you any verification paper,” I replied.

Hirschur’s expression froze in what I could only assume was shock. She recovered a beat later, however, and immediately began pleading on the grounds that we were from the same hometown. I sensed that she was going to drag this out, so I glared at her.

“If you continue to be so insistent, Professor Hirschur, I will not invite you to participate in changing Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes.”

That was enough to make Hirschur shut her mouth.

Professor Hirschur’s Disciple

Immediately after Raimund taught me how to improve the magic circle, I was hurried out of the room; Hartmut and Cornelius didn’t seem to want me staying any longer than was necessary. Raimund had proven himself so capable with his explanations that I wanted to ask about the tools Ferdinand had left behind and how to improve them, but I couldn’t sit around when my retainers were all being so prickly.

Upon returning to the dormitory, Cornelius and Hartmut instructed me to send a letter. “It would be best to write to Lord Ferdinand,” Cornelius said. “He’ll know better than anyone how Ehrenfest should deal with Professor Hirschur’s disciple.”

“I shall gather intelligence on Raimund,” Hartmut added. “I cannot imagine many will know of a random third-year apprentice medscholar, but I will see what I can do.”

We had ended up returning much sooner than fourth bell, and as my retainers busily got to work, Wilfried stared at me in confusion. “What happened this time?” he asked.

“Professor Hirschur’s new disciple is an apprentice scholar from Ahrensbach,” I explained.

His eyes shot open, and the most he managed in response was a startled, “Wha?!”

“Assuming he has free access to Professor Hirschur’s laboratory, it’s possible that all of our intelligence is flowing directly to Ahrensbach. Professor Hirschur is already quite limited in what she knows, since she spends so little time in our dorm, but we must see just how severe the information leak is.”

It was safe to say that Raimund knew everything Professor Hirschur did about the magic tools and circles she was researching. Given the absolute state the lab was in, it was likely impossible to hide anything from him.

“Would that mean they know everything of the magic circles we embroidered onto Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes?” Lieseleta asked,

looking worried. The magic circles existed to protect the shumils, but if our enemies knew what activated them and what they did when activated, it was more likely for their defenses to be penetrated.

“It will depend on how much Ferdinand has told Professor Hirschur... but yes, Raimund will know most of what we brought back in documents,” I said with a sigh and then began writing an emergency letter to Ferdinand. It was sent to Ehrenfest the moment I was done; all we could do now was await a response.

The common room was mostly populated with first-years who had finished their afternoon classes; most of the second-years were attending their practical lessons, and while there were some third-years present, they were certainly in the minority. Cornelius and Rihyarda were my only retainers presently with me, since Hartmut had swiftly left the dormitory after lunch to gather intelligence.

I observed the magic circles that Raimund had corrected and tried to learn his methods. His circles were entirely different from my own.

“Raimund is a third-year...” I muttered to myself. He was just beginning his third-year classes, while I had already completed all of my second-year ones; in theory, we should have known about as much as each other. Judithe had even mentioned that the third-years hadn’t learned any complicated circles yet, but Raimund was immersed in research with Hirschur and attending Gundolf’s lectures, so he knew far more about magecraft than I did. All the hard work he was putting into learning this stuff was clear from his suggested improvements, and I felt terrible about the way things had ended.

“He’s clearly dedicated so much time to studying magecraft,” I said. “It’s no wonder he was dying to read Lord Ferdinand’s book.”

“He is from Ahrensbach,” Cornelius replied plainly, fixing me with a tight look. I could understand why his feelings toward the duchy were so harsh—he had no doubt spent the two years after that fateful night dwelling on what he viewed as his failure as a guard knight.

“But containing one’s desire to read is an impossible task, would you not agree? Raimund has a book he wishes to read within his reach and yet he cannot even touch it. My heart aches for him.”

“I don’t think you need to worry about that...” Cornelius said with a sigh, slumping his shoulders. He came down onto his knees, such that his

head was right before my eyes.

“You are too tense,” I said and patted his light-green hair. It was almost on instinct, most likely from the days when I would do the same for Gil. “I understand that being on guard is natural for a knight, but if you do not relax at least while you are here in the dormitory, I fear you will one day fall apart.”

Cornelius’s expression softened, betraying his exasperation. He had gone from exuding the aura of a knight to that of an older brother. “If you were more on guard, Rozemyne, I wouldn’t need to be. How else am I meant to act when the person I’m supposed to protect is getting all empathetic for the enemy?”

“Being unable to read a book is one of the greatest misfortunes one can experience, so yes, I do empathize. But I am not careless. I do not want to be hurt, nor do I intend to put myself in harm’s way time and time again.”

Cornelius met my words with a dubious look, but before he could respond, the knight guarding the teleportation hall came rushing into the common room. “An emergency reply from Lord Ferdinand,” he announced.

Upon hearing this, Cornelius returned to his feet, his expression hardening once again. I could guess that he wanted to retrieve the letter, but Rihyarda moved first—she took the paper with one swift movement and then handed it to me.

I opened the letter, and as I started reading through it, my eyes widened. “Ah... It seems Ferdinand is coming here tomorrow afternoon,” I said.

“What?!”

“I realize adults shouldn’t visit the Royal Academy under normal circumstances, but it seems that he needs to speak with Professor Hirschur about how his magic tools are being handled and treated. He has asked us to invite her to dinner tomorrow. He also wishes to know about the circumstances before they meet, and in that regard, he has asked us to compile what we discussed in the laboratory and the information available to us regarding Raimund.”

Ferdinand wanted us to find out a great deal about Raimund, such as what faction he belonged to in Ahrensbach, whether he was connected to Count Bindewald, how much skill and knowledge he had when it came to magic tools, and how he viewed Ehrenfest.

“There’s no time to gather that much information by tomorrow

afternoon!” my retainers wailed, but Ferdinand being unreasonable was nothing new.

“Ferdinand will decide whether Professor Hirschur may attend the changing of Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes, so we have no choice but to do whatever we can,” I said. There was a chance he would move to restrain his teacher, so we needed to provide him with as much ammunition as we could.

Charlotte gave a firm nod of agreement. “Sister, I will send my retainers to gather intelligence as well. In fact, all members of the Ehrenfest Dormitory should use this opportunity to find out what they can. I shall rouse the troops. Uncle has found it necessary to break tradition for this visit, and we must prepare for his arrival as much as we can.”

Over dinner that night, we revealed that Professor Hirschur’s disciple was an apprentice scholar from Ahrensbach and that Ferdinand would be coming to determine how we handled things moving forward. Then, once everyone was on the same page, we asked them to gather information.

“Yet more problems, I see...” Ferdinand said as soon as he arrived with Justus and Eckhart. He took a seat in the common room, extended a hand, and then said, “Papers.”

Hartmut was used to helping Ferdinand in the temple, so he wasted no time in presenting the prepared documents. “Raimund is an apprentice medscholar not viewed all that favorably in Ahrensbach,” he stated, beginning his explanation. “His mother was born in Werkestock and served the executed second wife. At the moment, he is being raised in a house that has fallen out of the times. He is on the lower end when it comes to mana, and nobody in his family has particularly high hopes for him. That seems to be why he is quite dedicated to Professor Hirschur, who actually recognizes his talents.”

“I see. And his connection to Count Bindewald?”

“We could not find one. He has so little mana that he has been struggling even with his research. He initially attempted to recreate the magic tools and circles you left behind on his own, but this shortcoming means he has had to settle on simply improving them. It seems he admires you greatly as well. I am even told that he envies Lady Rozemyne, who is both rich in mana and in a position to request your teachings directly. He has said that

he wishes you could teach him and that he fervently wants to discuss your research with you.”

As it turned out, Raimund had wanted to join the all-nighter that Hirschur and Ferdinand had pulled after last year’s Interduchy Tournament. He also envied Hartmut, who had the opportunity to work with Ferdinand and look after his books.

“He sounds very much like Heidemarie,” Justus said with an expression like he was holding back laughter. Eckhart responded with a pained expression, while Ferdinand nodded in agreement.

I could only blink in confusion, unsure whom they were talking about. Rihyarda must have noticed this, as she whispered into my ear that Heidemarie was Eckhart’s late first wife. She had apparently served Ferdinand as a scholar and had assisted him with his brewing.

Wait... So both people in that relationship loved Ferdinand to death?!

I was positively stunned by these revelations, but it seemed the conversation had moved on without me. “Are there any documents showing what Raimund has discovered through his research?” Ferdinand asked.

“He modified one of my magic circles yesterday,” I noted.

I showed the circle in question, which elicited a slight, bemused smile from Ferdinand. “I am impressed you packed so much into it,” he said and then started carefully analyzing Raimund’s improvements. After some time, he muttered, “Interesting...” and shut his eyes in contemplation.

It was a short while before Ferdinand opened his eyes again.

“My conclusion is that I wish to maintain relations with Raimund and, if possible, use him as a tool to gain information about Ahrensbach,” he said. “Our situation is not like before, when we could manage by cutting ties with our adversaries. We are now the Tenth, meaning other duchies will want to gather intelligence on us. We are also doing business with Klassenberg and the Sovereignty, which brings us to the attention of the other top duchies. If they have someone who might be drawn in with innocuous research documents, it would be best to remain on guard but nonetheless bait them into revealing their secrets. I will determine what documents Raimund may see, while all of you gather experience here in the Royal Academy. This will not be easy by any means, and we cannot expect help from adults, who are already so set in their ways.”

The surrounding students nodded, while I topped things off with an

enthusiastic, “Understood!” Ferdinand must have heard that, and after shooting me a look, he began to lightly tap his temple.

“However,” Ferdinand continued, “I am forbidding Rozemyne from speaking with Raimund. She will spill every secret she knows based on emotion and inertia. Let her communicate only through an apprentice scholar.”

“Um, wait... Just me?!” I exclaimed, protesting with wide eyes. “I would rather not receive this kind of special treatment!”

Ferdinand glared at me. “You have a strong tendency to be even softer on those who pull on your heartstrings. As someone raised in the temple, the ways that you think and act are fundamentally different from the rest of us. I cannot determine when or where you might suddenly consider someone an ally—or even family—and that is why I cannot risk letting you speak to Raimund directly. It is much too dangerous.”

“Ngh...”

There was nothing I could say in response—especially when I was indeed prepared to accept Raimund as a fellow bookworm. Ferdinand knew me far too well.

“You are closer to the library’s and my magic tools than anyone, and you know much about trends and technologies that need to remain concealed at all costs,” Ferdinand said. “Your lack of secrecy is deeply problematic, and if you cannot protect knowledge that must remain unknown, I will have you returned to Ehrenfest at once. Yes, it is important that you gain more socializing experience, but your socializing impacts the future of our entire duchy. You have already finished your second-year classes, so it would be safest to call you back before you can make a cataclysmic error.”

Again, I was unable to argue. My scheduled tea parties were all with professors or greater duchies, but even then, I didn’t want to be sent back. I had things to look forward to this year other than just reading, after all.

“I would not like to be sent back to Ehrenfest before I can work in the Library Committee with Hannelore,” I said.

“I do not wish to forbid you from spending time with your friends, but you have already contacted the third prince and are being targeted by Drewanchel. Take care not to worsen the situation such that I have no other choice but to call you back,” Ferdinand replied.

I could do nothing but agree, since I really was in a precarious situation.

“Those around you will need to take care as well,” Ferdinand continued, turning his gaze to Wilfried and Charlotte. “Raimund is attending Professor Gundolf’s lessons, so I believe it would be wise to spread only some knowledge of my research and then leave dealing with Drewanchel to Raimund and Professor Hirschur. Tell them that only I know the details they seek. We can better control the information reaching Drewanchel through limiting what Raimund knows, rather than allowing Rozemyne to attend a Drewanchel tea party and potentially leak everything.”

Ferdinand then turned to Hartmut. “Raimund is but the first of many researchers who will soon open communications with Ehrenfest. You and the other apprentice scholars serving the archducal family must handle them.”

“Understood,” Hartmut replied.

The long-term prospects of our relationships with Raimund and other duchies mattered, but what was happening tomorrow mattered more. I voiced what I was most concerned about.

“Ferdinand, what about changing Schwartz and Weiss? That is planned to happen tomorrow.”

“Neither Raimund nor Professor Hirschur will attend. I have already allowed her a number of my documents. Just tell her that, as a scientist, she should be able to figure out the rest on her own. They concern magic circles that I devised, but since these circles also belong to the Sovereignty, the tools should not be shown to an apprentice scholar from Ahrensbach.” Ferdinand then extended a hand to me. “Rozemyne, where are the documents I gave you to manipulate Professor Hirschur?”

“Philine,” I called, and she brought them out at once for Ferdinand to flip through. He took out several particular sheets and returned the rest.

“These may be leaked without issue,” Ferdinand said. “Use them when necessary.”

“I thank you ever so much.”

And with that, it was dinnertime—our discussion had proven quite long indeed, and Ferdinand had needed a chance to read over the prepared documents.

Hirschur arrived soon enough and greeted Ferdinand. It was with a perfectly calm expression that she mentioned what a surprise it was to have received a letter of invitation, but I could tell that she was feeling tense.

“To think you would come all this way, Ferdinand...” she said. Adults were generally forbidden from meddling in Royal Academy affairs, since it was believed that the children needed an opportunity to grow and accumulate experience. And although the children would at times send questions back home, it was highly unusual for an adult to arrive and call for a professor.

“This matter concerns magic tools of my own creation, so my direct involvement was necessary,” Ferdinand replied. Our current situation was his own mess, and there was nobody he could entrust to clean it up for him —such was his excuse for getting involved personally.

Ferdinand and Hirschur’s conversation continued all throughout dinner and showed no signs of stopping even when the last person had finished. During this time, they touched upon various matters such as how to deal with Raimund, how to handle the magic tools, and future information sharing.

“There is a broader chasm between our duchies than your gathered intelligence would lead you to believe, Professor Hirschur,” Ferdinand went on. “I was saved by your teaching philosophy myself, and I have no intention of rejecting it... but I must do what is expected of an Ehrenfest noble.”

“Shall we treat Raimund as your disciple then, Ferdinand?” Hirschur asked. “I am sure he would adore that.”

“I will select the most innocuous magic circles and tools that I have made and give them to him as homework assignments. Should he manage to improve them, he may return them to me via an Ehrenfest scholar. I will evaluate them, then send new documents in return for information on Ahrensbach.”

“I can already see him spilling all of Ahrensbach’s secrets for those documents,” Hirschur said. She was wearing a bemused smile, but it seemed she had no intention of getting involved or interfering. Apparently, just as it was natural for knowledge to flow from teacher to student, it was natural for knowledge to flow from student to teacher. Ferdinand would train Raimund as his disciple through long-distance communication and then invite him to Ehrenfest as a retainer once he came of age.

“Is it possible that Ahrensbach will not permit him to leave?” I asked.

“Of course,” Ferdinand replied. “They will not wish to lose a skilled

researcher so easily. And if they wish to keep Raimund, they will need to grant him a lofty position, bringing him into the upper folds of the duchy. Such an outcome will allow me to attain even more meaningful information. He may either climb the social ranks in Ahrensbach or come to Ehrenfest as my retainer."

So his only future now is to be your pawn? I guess that's fine, assuming he wants that, but... Eeh...

As I debated the issue in my head, Hirschur put on a soft smile. "You certainly have changed, Ferdinand," she said. "In the past, no matter how wonderful of a magic tool you made, you would lose interest upon completing it and set it aside forever. You showed so little investment that you would simply allow me to have any that took my fancy. To think you would raise a disciple from afar, selecting which magic tools to give them and carefully evaluating their results..."

It was a move in pursuit of gathering intelligence, but even then, Hirschur had not expected Ferdinand to work so hard for Ehrenfest. Throughout his time at the Royal Academy, he had presumably had to endure persistent interference from Veronica, all while receiving no credit for the works he actually completed.

"Politics change over the years, as do those shaken to and fro by its currents," Ferdinand said with a calm expression. He then headed to Hirschur's laboratory with Eckhart and Justus. It seemed that he would be taking back any magic tools that he did not want to risk Raimund modifying such that even mednobles could use them. Some things were too dangerous to be allowed to spread far and wide.

Soon enough, a magic circle spread out near the teleportation hall started producing one magic tool after another. They would pose a serious threat if activated accidentally, so laynobles within the dormitory were tasked with carrying them one by one to the luggage carrier.

"There are this many dangerous magic tools? If the safe ones aren't even here, then just how many did Ferdinand make in total while he was in the Academy?" I asked with exasperation as I watched a small mountain form on the carrier.

Hartmut smiled. "Will you not do the same, Lady Rozemyne?"

"I do not plan to."

"Is that so? I see a clear future in which you produce one bizarre magic

tool after another, all while claiming that each is essential for the library."

Okay, I can't argue with that.

As I pursed my lips, Hartmut crouched down so that only I could hear him. "Lady Rozemyne, when do you intend to accept Roderick's name?"

"Hartmut?"

"I am going to be graduating this year, so for next year onward, I will need to train a scholar who can stand between Raimund and you. Given that he is a medscholar, you will want a medscholar or archscholar of your own for this," he explained, his orange eyes carrying a sense of real urgency. Philine was doing her best, but status was something that no amount of hard work could overcome.

Changing Schwartz and Weiss

“I believe it’s about time to leave,” I said. “Afternoon lessons have begun, so remember to walk quietly and not bother anyone.”

Today, we were going to the library to dress Schwartz and Weiss in their new clothes. We had decided to wait until afternoon lessons started so that we were less likely to be seen, and the girls who were accompanying us were now eagerly standing with boxes containing the outfits and accessories. Since the retainers Charlotte had chosen to join us were also girls, the only boys coming along were those who had been directly ordered to by Ferdinand so that they could give reports afterward: Hartmut and Cornelius.

“I’ll grant you all temporary permission to touch the shumils,” I said, “so please put your all into getting them changed.”

The girls all wore broad smiles—except for Lieseleta, who was clearly trying to maintain a stern expression. Unbeknownst to her, however, this stony facade kept giving way to a huge grin, making her seem the happiest of all.

“You sure love shumils, don’t you, Lieseleta?” Judithe teased.

Lieseleta presumably took this as a jab about her being unprofessional, considering how self-conscious she was about keeping work separate from her private life. She gave me a concerned look to see how I was reacting and then muttered, “Are they not adorable?” while blushing a little with embarrassment.

“I am grateful for your love of shumils, Lieseleta. Without it, the clothes likely would not have been completed in time,” I said.

We continued our conversation as we walked to the library. Upon our arrival, Schwartz and Weiss opened the reading room door and poked their heads out.

“Milady’s here.”

“Changing clothes today.”

Solange arrived a moment after, walking slowly behind the two shumils,

whose heads bobbed from side to side as they moved. When she saw just how many of us there were, what with Charlotte and her retainers too, she gave a refined laugh.

“Oh my. So many people are here with you today,” she said. “Do follow me.”

Solange guided us to the back of her office. There was the parlor space for registering students and hosting tea parties, then behind that was her work desk, a locked bookshelf, and a door to the reading room. Even farther behind that was a partition screen, and today she would be leading us beyond it.

I thought this would be her personal space with a bed, but apparently not...

Her room was basically like mine, and when I had first seen Schwartz and Weiss sitting next to each other, I had assumed this was a private space with a bed. In reality, however, it was an empty room with little more than a table. Solange certainly did not live here.

“Please do the changing here,” Solange said. “I finished my registration work at noon, and I cleaned up the area so that several of you can work at once.”

Cornelius and Leonore stood by the screen as guards, while Charlotte’s guard knights and Judithe would watch the changing space itself.

Lieseleta took command of the girls, having the boxes lined up while Brunhilde and the others opened them one after another to make sure everything was there. Charlotte and I could not participate in this preparatory work, given our status, so we simply watched.

“By the way, Professor Solange... where exactly do you live?” I asked. “Dormitory supervisors have rooms in their dormitories, and teachers have rooms in specialty buildings according to the topic they teach, correct?”

I was already aware that professors had rooms in their particular specialty buildings. Those who were dormitory supervisors also had rooms in their respective dorms, although the one in ours saw very little use, considering that Hirschur almost always slept in her lab.

Solange pointed at a door that was completely hidden by the screen when looking from the entrance of the room. “I live in one of the rooms within the librarian dormitory, beyond that door,” she explained. “Much like in the student dormitories, there is a dining hall on the first floor, rooms for

men on the second, and rooms for women on the third."

So the librarians did have rooms in the library. I could hardly express how envious I was of Solange; I wished that I could live here as well.

"I will return to the reading room now," Solange said once she had seen that our preparations were complete. "I entrust the changing to all of you."

After seeing her off, I turned to look at the girls—who were all ready to go—and then looked at the two shumils. "Schwartz, Weiss. We will now be changing you into your new clothes," I said. "The girls here are going to be helping out. Until the changing is done, I hereby permit all those present to touch you."

Schwartz and Weiss slowly turned their heads, as if registering every individual present.

"The girls here."

"Permission granted."

"Now then, everyone," I continued, "let us begin the changing. You may touch Schwartz and Weiss as well, Charlotte."

"Yes, Sister." Charlotte's indigo eyes sparkled as she entered the ring of girls.

I was the only one of the girls not on guard duty who wasn't going to be changing Schwartz and Weiss—not because I was slacking off, but because it was unideal for me to touch them.

Namely because the circles will start glowing.

No matter how well the embroidery hid our magic circles, making them glow would spill the beans entirely. Charlotte and my retainers knew where they were and what they looked like, since they had embroidered them, but it was best to keep all that a secret from the other students.

"Schwartz, I'm going to remove these buttons now," one girl said.

"Weiss, raise this arm, please," requested another.

The girls touched Schwartz and Weiss all over, chattering excitedly as they removed the shumils' clothes. It was very heartwarming to see Charlotte break into such a happy smile after reaching out and touching Schwartz.

Leonore, who had been standing by the partition, walked over and whispered into my ear. "Lady Rozemyne, it seems Professor Solange has urgent business." I went with her to the partition, and indeed, there was Solange with an exceedingly troubled expression.

“Professor Solange?” I asked.

“Prince Hildebrand is here to see Schwartz and Weiss,” she explained. I immediately sensed that I was about to wander into another chance encounter with royalty and recalled Ferdinand’s threats from the night before about forcing me back to Ehrenfest.

Um... Prince, we came here specifically so that students wouldn’t see what we’re doing! Don’t just wander around everywhere!

“I explained that their clothes are currently being changed, but...”

It seemed that while Hildebrand had offered to wait until we were done, his retainers all expressed interest in the affair. They wanted to see the clothes we were keeping for ourselves—particularly for their feystones—and refusing them was no trivial matter. The prince’s retainers were Sovereign archnobles, and on top of them being Solange’s bosses, archnobles close to royalty were even higher in status than archduke candidates such as myself.

We could have avoided Sovereign influence if we had stealthily changed Schwartz and Weiss in our dormitory, but here in the Royal Academy library, it was hard to refuse Sovereign scholars from viewing the changing of royal magic tools. Our decision to do things here had evidently backfired.

“They may enter,” I conceded.

“I thank you,” Solange said with a sigh of relief and promptly returned to the reading room. Leonore and Cornelius tightened their expressions as she went.

“Prince Hildebrand and his retainers are here. They wish to see Schwartz and Weiss,” I told the girls. The cheery atmosphere disappeared in an instant and everyone knelt where they were. It was only natural for the mood to change so dramatically; none of us had expected royalty to appear.

Solange guided the prince and his retainers into the room. Hildebrand seemed to be examining the office with very frequent glances; I got the impression that he wanted to look all over the place but was containing his curiosity. It was rather good manners for a boy who had just recently been baptized, and when compared to how Wilfried had acted at that age, I couldn’t help but silently whistle.

Now this is a bona fide rich boy educated from birth.

Upon noticing that everyone had paused their work to kneel, Hildebrand

waved a hand and said, “Please continue.” As the girls returned to changing the shumils, he came over to me, presumably because I was the only one not getting involved.

His eyes were about level with mine, which meant we were a similar height. I stood up as straight as I could, craned my neck, and got on tiptoe, trying to maintain my pride as an older student, but my legs soon began to tremble. It didn’t seem like I would be able to keep up the front for much longer, so I returned to standing normally, feeling a little disappointed.

I’m just barely taller than a newly baptized kid... Oh well. At least I’m not shorter than him.

“I thought Weiss was very cute when I visited the library the other day, so I came to see them again,” Hildebrand said. “I was surprised when I found they weren’t in the reading room, but I see their clothes are being changed.”

“It seems they must be given new clothes each time they change masters, which is why Ehrenfest prepared new outfits,” I explained. “And they are not just cute; they are exceptionally skilled workers.”

I went on to extol the virtues of Schwartz and Weiss as Hildebrand continued watching the changing process with curious eyes. Not only did the two shumils manage the lending of carrels and reading materials, but they also remembered who had which book and who hadn’t paid. They were essential to the smooth running of the library.

“I must kneel before the wondrous powers of the royal family,” I said. “I am told that ancient royalty made Schwartz and Weiss, but the Royal Academy professors do not seem to know how. Are there any records in the palace of the time when they were made, by chance?”

I was bursting with excitement at the very idea, but Hildebrand seemed unsure of what to say. He gazed quizzically at one of his retainers, prompting them to answer in his place. “My sincerest apologies,” the man said, “but I have come across no such records in the palace library.”

The palace library! Oh, such glorious words!

I could feel my entire world brighten at his answer; a new library meant countless opportunities to come across new books. It seemed only natural that I should ask for more details, but as I opened my mouth, something tugged on my sleeve. I turned and saw Leonore with quite an intense smile on her face.

Okay. I understand. “Shut up, and don’t say anything else.” Got it.

I closed my mouth and remembered the warning I had received—that I always spun out of control when it came to talking about libraries. This was a rare opportunity to get valuable intel on the palace library, but displeasing royalty here could end in me being forever barred from entering.

I need to be careful.

As Charlotte had suggested to me, I needed to start with something that Hildebrand and I found mutually interesting and then gradually shift the topic to libraries from there. But what common ground was there between the two of us?

I fell into thought, at which point Hildebrand appeared to take the initiative, speaking in a manner that came across as both hesitant and timid. “Erm... I’m told that Rozemyne of Ehrenfest is engaged, but what of...?” He trailed off, although it was obvious whom he meant.

Our common ground is... Charlotte?!

I widened my eyes at the sudden question, blinked for a bit, and then shook my head calmly. “No plans have been made as of yet, but I expect there to be discussions during the Interduchy Tournament or the Archduke Conference. Sometime soon, at least.”

Adolphine of Drewanchel had been sizing up Charlotte during the fellowship gathering—it wasn’t hard to imagine she was calculating the benefit of marrying her to Ortwin. Given how many people had probed for engagements with me at the Interduchy Tournament and Archduke Conference, I could guess that Charlotte would soon be receiving some as well.

Hildebrand seemed somewhat taken aback by my response. He allowed his bright purple eyes to wander downward until his gaze settled on the floor and then said, “I suppose I am too young then? One must be old to be seen as reliable.”

Um, wait... What? Does he have the hots for Charlotte? Oh no. I don’t have a clue what kind of boys she likes!

This was not the kind of topic I was equipped to speak about at the moment, so I frantically searched for an innocuous answer. “I do not believe that one’s age determines how reliable they are, so there is nothing more I can say.” It was my best attempt, but even then, Hildebrand seemed devastated. There was only one other solution I could think of. “If you are

that curious, shall I ask Charlotte for you?”

“What...?” Hildebrand gave me a look of sheer confusion and then repeatedly glanced between Charlotte and me in something resembling alarm. “No, that isn’t necessary. I was just curious. Do keep this talk a secret. I would not want my curiosity to cause any problems.”

“I see. Understood, then.” It was certainly true that marriage-related probing from royalty would cause chaos, and given that Hildebrand had merely been a little curious, there was no need to throw everyone into a panic.

I’ll just wait for our little prince here to settle his feelings.

“My apologies for the wait, Prince Hildebrand, Rozemyne,” Charlotte interjected as she brought Schwartz and Weiss over to us. “How do they look?”

The two shumils’ clothes were primarily black—as expected, since this was the Royal Academy. I had suggested making one look like a butler and the other a maid, but almost none of my original designs had ended up being used. All that seemed to remain of my suggestions were the matching hair ornaments on their chests.

Schwartz was wearing a white shirt, although since they were wearing a vest over it, the only parts I could actually see were the sleeves. The vest itself was decorated with complex embroidery which masked the similarly complex magic circles beneath it. Schwartz also had a cute ribbon tie made with dyed cloth, and there were many colorful flowers and leaves embroidered onto their pants, making Lieseleta’s enthusiastic involvement more than clear.

Weiss was wearing a dress, the sleeves of which were generously embroidered with flowers and leaves like those on Schwartz. Their apron was also covered in complex embroidery, and the only white of their clothing still visible were the frills on their shoulders. By their neck was a tie-dyed ribbon and a flower ornament. The girls had also wanted to put ornaments on Weiss’s ears but ultimately decided against it, since the ornaments had proven too heavy and were therefore too much of a hindrance.

“Looks good, milady?”

“Milady. Praise us.”

“You both look adorable. Everyone’s efforts have produced such

wonderful outfits for the two of you to wear. The embroidery is excellent as well," I said, praising not just the shumils but also everyone involved in making the clothes.

Hildebrand gave a peaceful smile. "I am glad to have seen such a wonderful sight."

I took Schwartz's and Weiss's old outfits and presented them to Hildebrand. "These are what they were wearing before," I said. "Do remember that once you button them up, it will complete the magic circles, and the defensive charms will activate when filled with mana."

Hildebrand's retainers accepted the clothes with a nod and then looked them over. "Was Ehrenfest using these magic circles directly?" one asked.

"No," I replied. "Lord Ferdinand modified them. I am still not an expert on magic circles, and so I ask that you direct any questions to his teacher, Professor Hirschur."

"Understood."

I wasn't about to attempt an answer when I didn't understand the subject matter myself. I had also been told to direct any questions about magic tools and circles to Hirschur and Raimund, so I just gave the response that Ferdinand had given me.

"Now, I shall replenish your mana," I said, beckoning Schwartz and Weiss. I touched the feystones on their foreheads and started pouring in mana while stroking them. In turn, they closed their eyes as though enjoying the experience.

"Aah! How cute!" Hildebrand exclaimed, reaching out to them himself.

"No! Don't touch!" I shouted in a panic, but it was too late. The instant his fingertips brushed against one of the shumils, a cracking sound was heard, and there came a momentary flash like a small spark of electricity.

Hildebrand gasped and started nursing his hand, while his guard knights immediately readied their schtappes.

"None can touch Schwartz and Weiss except those registered as their master, and those with their master's permission," I explained. "Prince Hildebrand, do you have no such magic tools in the palace?" As far as I knew, there were plentiful magic tools in the palace, all of which could only be used by those registered with them.

One of the prince's retainers sighed. "All magic tools in the palace may be used by royalty. This is the first one that Prince Hildebrand has been

unable to touch.”

“Oh. So I can’t touch Schwartz and Weiss...” Hildebrand said, slumping his shoulders. It was then that one of his retainers turned to me.

“These magic tools are the heirlooms of royalty. In which case, do you not think that Prince Hildebrand should be their master, rather than you?” he asked. He was telling me to concede ownership to the prince, and unlike last year, I nodded at the suggestion.

“It would be ideal for royalty to have control of Schwartz and Weiss, so that they can continue functioning even when I am absent,” I said. “Prince Hildebrand could come to replenish their mana even during the seasons when I am away from the Royal Academy. I would not need to prepare mana or feystones for them, which will ease the weight on me significantly.”

I was only supplying mana to Schwartz and Weiss because Solange needed them for the library. If royalty could do that in my place, I would absolutely prefer it.

The retainer met my ready agreement with surprise, but the scholars who were looking at the clothes furrowed their brows. “You frame supplying these tools with mana as though it were trivial, but such a task would place too much of a strain on Prince Hildebrand, who was only recently baptized,” one said.

If they were worried about his mana quantity and health then there were a lot of other things they needed to consider too. I decided to list them all out so that his scholars could make a more informed decision.

“There are other concerns as well,” I said. “Will the prince be able to supply Schwartz and Weiss with mana on a regular enough basis when he must wait for the library to empty before visiting? Furthermore, were he to become their master in full, they would need new clothes yet again. Do you have the staff and resources for that?”

Ferdinand mentioned that he had used some fairly rare materials that he had been saving for quite some time on these clothes. Perhaps the Sovereignty was overflowing with such resources, but the embroidery was still a massive job that would take a long time. This was only confirmed when one of the scholars, who had been tracing the embroidery with his finger, averted his gaze. It seemed that he was not particularly eager to take on this kind of task.

“And, most important of all...” I turned to face the prince, who was looking a bit stunned. “You need an iron resolve, Prince Hildebrand.”

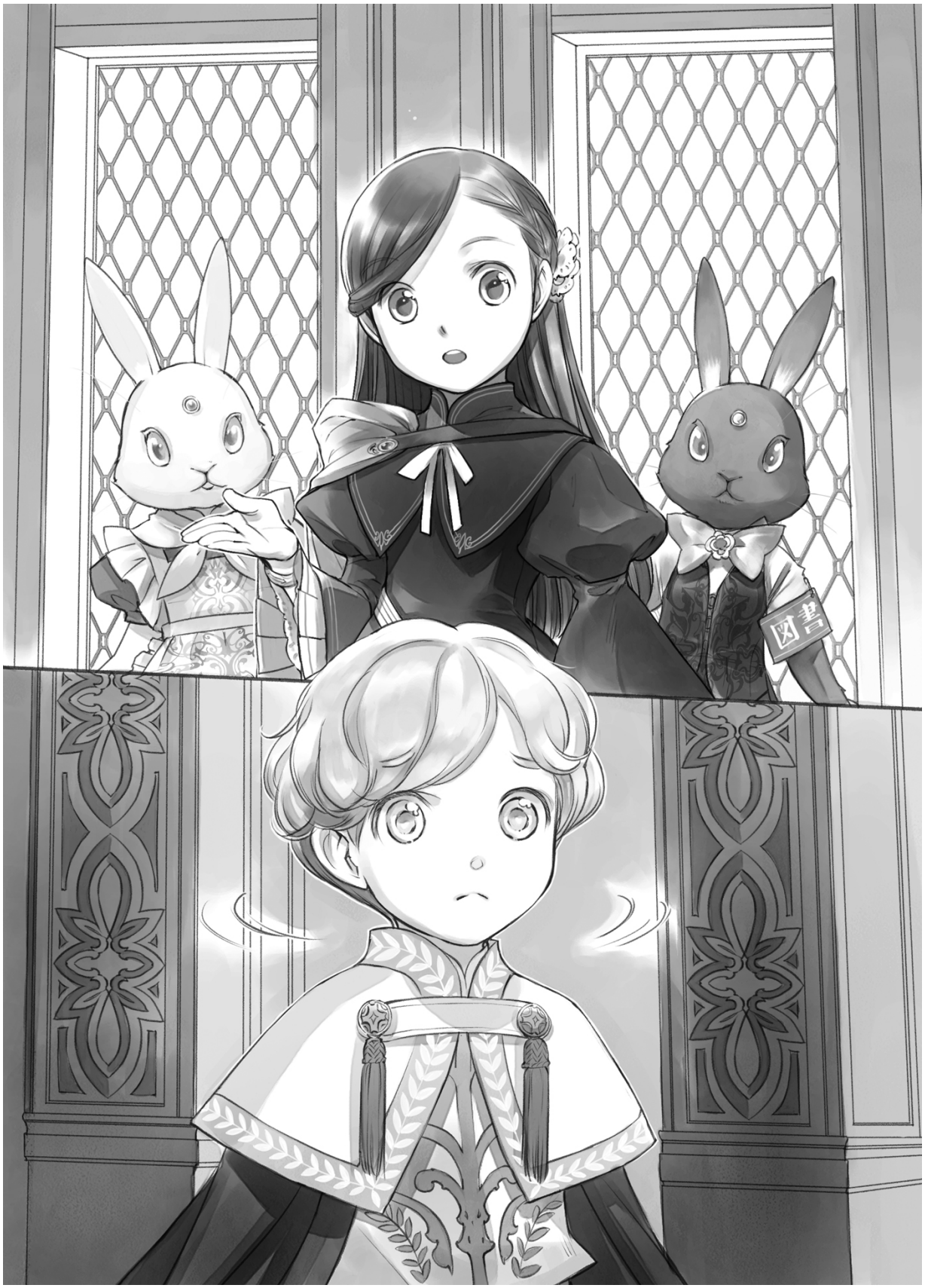
“An iron resolve?”

I nodded and continued in a serious tone: “All those registered as Schwartz and Weiss’s master are called ‘milady’—even the men. The male librarians of the past were called as such, and you will be no exception. Is that acceptable?”

Many boys the prince’s age looked rather effeminate, and this was especially true for the prince himself. He had such a pretty face and came across as so peaceful that he could very easily be mistaken for a girl in the right clothes. Becoming Schwartz and Weiss’s master would result in him being called “milady” on top of this, which ran the risk of wounding his masculine pride.

“Prince Hildebrand, do you have the iron resolve to be called ‘milady’ forevermore?” I reiterated.

The prince shook his head firmly. “I’m a boy. I don’t want to be called a lady.” I got the impression that he had once been mistaken for a girl or some such and was traumatized by the memory.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“In that case, I would suggest that you be registered as a mana supplier,” I said. “By doing this, you will get to touch them, and they will continue to call you by your name. You also will not need to visit the library on a regular basis.”

“That. I want to do that,” Hildebrand declared, his eyes sparkling. His retainers concurred, likely because it was a much lighter burden on him.

“However,” I noted, “you will need both Dark and Light affinities to supply them with mana. Will that be a problem?”

“Not at all!”

And so, Hildebrand registered as a mana supplier. Just like that, the Library Committee had secured a new member. He was in a good mood as we saw him off, since he could now stroke Schwartz and Weiss all over. I gave a relieved sigh, having successfully survived the situation without displeasing royalty.

“One truly cannot predict what events will suddenly befall you, nor can one stop them once they begin...” Charlotte muttered to herself.

As it turned out, Charlotte had wanted to ensure that I didn’t cross paths with royalty again... but things had progressed so suddenly that she could only stand and watch. Even by the time the prince was saying his farewells, she had not found an opportunity to step in. It was too bad, in all honesty; I was pretty sure that Hildebrand would have loved for her to join the conversation.

“Let us hurry back to the dormitory,” Charlotte said, hurrying us along. “I fear that something else is bound to happen if we do not.” All the girls we had brought with us for help seemed exhausted just from having met with royalty.

As I returned to the dorms with everyone, I suddenly remembered something and turned to Charlotte. “Out of curiosity, what do you think of younger men?” I asked. “Would you find one hard to rely on?”

Charlotte returned a look as though she sensed my intentions; then, she placed a hand on her cheek and closed her eyes in contemplation. “It would depend on the person, but I tend to find older men more reliable. Wilfried does have my love, despite everything.”

My, oh my... Too bad, Prince. You’re out of the race.

I made a mental note that Charlotte preferred older boys, but as I did, she looked down at me with concern. “Do you not agree that our brother is

more worthy of relying on than Prince Hildebrand?” she asked. It seemed that she was pushing the whole “reliability” metaphor, but far be it from me to commit the faux pas of pointing that out.

“Well... As always, what I want most in a partner is their willingness to let me do anything I want with our library. I have not forgotten Wilfried’s promise that I may do as I wish with the dormitory bookshelf...”

For some reason, this answer made Charlotte look exceptionally uneasy.

Gathering Feystones

“Classes are truly important, so please prioritize planning around Lady Hannelore’s classes,” Solange had said to me. I had sent a letter of invitation to Hannelore once Brunhilde had my schedule in order, but she had responded that she was unable to attend on the first suggested date, since it overlapped with her sociology lessons. Another date was soon chosen, however, and now the bookworm tea party was charging full steam ahead.

“We will need to send an invitation to Professor Solange as well,” Brunhilde noted, so I speedily wrote the letter and then half-skipped to the library.

Woohoo! A tea party with Professor Solange and Lady Hannelore!

The bookworm tea party was being held in the library’s office, and I could already feel my excitement steadily rising. I needed to be careful to not get too emotional.

“Milady’s here.”

“Milady. Book time?”

“Oh. Rozemyne really is here.”

That last voice was Hildebrand, who was with Schwartz and Weiss when I entered the library. He had come to see them time and time again over the past few days—apparently he would stroke them until he was satisfied and then be on his way. Even the shumils had noted that he was exceedingly bored. He was borrowing study guides for first-years but had apparently said that there were few books he could read in general. It was simply too sad that he wanted to read but had so few options, so I had sent a letter to Ehrenfest asking whether I could lend him the children’s books I had made.

“Good day, Prince Hildebrand.”

I performed the customary greetings before heading over to where Solange was. She had said with a chuckle that her job was a lot more stressful now that she was hosting royalty each and every day—although she had gotten a bit more used to it, since she knew that he was only

visiting for Schwartz and Weiss.

“Professor Solange, we have settled on a date for the tea party,” I said, presenting the letter of invitation.

Solange accepted it with a joyful smile. “Oh my... How exciting. Hm... Four days from now, I see.” She rarely seemed to venture outside the library, and since she socialized with the other professors less during the winter, when the students were around, she had said that she really enjoyed our tea party last year. I would be putting enthusiasm into these preparations myself.

As we smiled at each other, a young voice interjected. “There’s a tea party four days from now?” Hildebrand asked. It seemed that he had wandered over with Schwartz and Weiss. “Should I refrain from visiting the library, then?”

Schwartz and Weiss would be doing work in the reading room like always, so I assumed there was no issue with Hildebrand coming to see them, but apparently it was socially unacceptable to have a relaxing tea party in the office while there was royalty attending.

Maybe I should ask him to stay back here? I wondered, turning to Solange for her to give the final answer. She rested a hand on her cheek and looked down at me.

“Lady Rozemyne, what would you say about inviting Prince Hildebrand to our tea party? He has been registered as an assistant mana supplier, and we will need to tell that to Lady Hannelore.”

Oh. Huh. I was under the impression that we were having an all-girls tea party, but if we consider it a Library Committee gathering instead, we’ll definitely want the prince there too.

Hannelore would presumably find the situation easier to handle if we gave her an advance warning that Hildebrand was attending the tea party and then mentioned that he had joined the committee on the day of, rather than having her find out at the very last minute that she was going to be in the presence of royalty.

As I nodded to myself, Hildebrand looked between Solange and me, his bright purple eyes brimming with hope. I returned a smile, internally thankful that I hadn’t just told him to go away before consulting Solange.

“Prince Hildebrand, I wish to send you a letter of invitation as well,” I said. “I am aware this is quite an abrupt request; I hope it will not disturb

you.”

“Not at all,” the prince replied. “In fact, I would love one. There are not too many places I can go.” He was positively beaming at the thought, but what about his retainers? I glanced over to see that they all wore plastered-on smiles, and one gestured with his eyes to Brunhilde.

“I would like to hear the details from one of your attendants, Lady Rozemyne.”

“Brunhilde. If you will.”

“Understood.”

Despite being tense with anxiety, Brunhilde put on a calm smile and headed over to the prince’s retainer. I felt a little bad for her, having to suddenly work with Sovereign retainers of royalty, but there was no time for pity. I turned my attention back to Hildebrand.

“I can’t wait,” he said. “Almost all of the tea parties I’ve attended have just been my mother and me.”

Hildebrand had only recently been baptized and was still rather new to socializing. Aside from a number of tea parties with his mother’s family, he had pretty much no experience whatsoever. Hopefully our gathering would help him to stave off the boredom.

“Will you be reading again today, Lady Rozemyne?” the prince asked. “I will stay with Weiss, so you may go to the second floor without fear.”

In other words, it was reading time. Hildebrand was a good boy who knew just how passionate I was about books—it was for this reason that he would always suggest I go and read after only a short discussion. I thanked him and then went up to the second floor, as I was now so used to doing.

Light of all different colors painted my hands, pulling me from my book and informing me that the bell would soon ring. It was time to leave for lunch, so I asked Philine to return my book for me and then started toward the exit. Hildebrand was already nowhere to be seen, meaning the library was quiet and devoid of other students.

I said my farewells to Schwartz and Weiss, and the bell chimed just as I stepped outside the library. My destination now was the central building, but as I made my way there, I saw a familiar face walking briskly in my direction. It was Raimund, Hirschur’s—and now also Ferdinand’s—disciple.

“Lady Rozemyne,” he said upon noticing me, putting on a truly happy smile. He sought my permission to continue and then openly began to express his thanks. “Lord Hartmut told me it was you who asked Lord Ferdinand to take me under his wing. It’s thanks to you that he accepted me as an apprentice disciple.”

Such was the made-up cover story we were using so that I could more easily serve as a go-between for Ferdinand and Raimund. I had been chosen because it was more believable for me to have made the suggestion than Wilfried or Charlotte, who had never even met Raimund.

“After I answer my list of questions from Lord Ferdinand, he’ll give me new research problems to work on. And when I’m done, he’ll grade my results,” Raimund said, sounding quite genuinely pleased as he showed me the problems he had received and said that he would be spending all afternoon locked away in Hirschur’s lab. He wore a dazzling smile that made it clear he was pouring his all into something he loved.

“Raimund, when you finish the problems, please do contact me through Professor Hirschur,” I said. “I am going to be sending them to Lord Ferdinand for you.”

“Right! I want to get them done as soon as possible. I have the answers to his first batch of questions here. Please do send them right away.” Raimund eagerly held out some documents and gave them to Hartmut; it seemed that someone had given him plant paper to use.

“Consider it done. Now, if you’ll excuse me...”

I continued on my way to the central building. Behind me, I could hear the patter of excited footsteps as Raimund ran to the scholar building.

As soon as we were back in the dormitory, Hartmut began reading the answers he had received from Raimund. He let me see the paper as well, and on it was a list of questions about Ahrensbach styled entirely like a geography test; Raimund had essentially finished his real exams and then accepted this additional one in his free time. I could easily imagine him running around, desperately collecting information to answer these questions and get his next research problems.

“I have much to learn from this situation...” Hartmut muttered. “Bewitching a valuable informant with just enough bait, then exploiting the mindset of a student desperate to pass exams by providing them with an exam-like list of questions. I have never seen such rational and coldly

efficient intelligence gathering before.” He was stunned at how swiftly information on Ahrensbach’s internals had fallen into our hands.

“We will be hunting feybeasts today,” Roderick announced that Earthday after breakfast. He was going to be heading out with some apprentice knights, mainly those belonging to the former Veronica faction. It seemed that Hartmut was hurrying him on, saying that if giving me his name was truly his intention, he would need to act soon. The other children felt similarly, wanting to gather the feystones just in case, even though they hadn’t yet settled on what they would be doing.

“Be careful, Roderick,” I said. “Do not forget that you are just a scholar.”

“Of course, Lady Rozemyne.”

After seeing Roderick and the others off, my retainers gathered in a private room to formulate our response to Ehrenfest. Yesterday, we had reported my inviting Hildebrand to a tea party, and we had received in turn a flurry of questions along the lines of, “Why?” and, “How?” I could already tell that our morning was going to be expended entirely on writing our answers, much like when Hildebrand had joined the Library Committee.

“But this time, it was Professor Solange who suggested that we have him join us, so we were surely right to send the invitation. It would have been more rude of us not to, right?” I asked Brunhilde, seeing as she had been there. I was so poor at socializing that I needed to get a second opinion on even my most basic reactions.

She gave an uncomfortable expression and said, “It would have been better for us if you had taken a step back after agreeing with Professor Solange’s assessment, rather than addressing the prince then and there. In the future, even during urgent situations, please leave any invitations to your attendants, rather than taking matters into your own hands.”

“Understood. I shall do that next time.”

Brunhilde’s answer was made even stronger by the fact that one of the prince’s retainers had indeed called her over to handle the necessary arrangements for the tea party then and there. It was the retainers who suffered when thrown into situations like that, and when advising me on what to do instead, their language had shifted from a lighter, “You may

wish to do X at times," to a far more exhausted, "In these cases, please just do X."

"The tea party itself will not be an issue though, right?" I asked. "We had experience attending a tea party with royalty last year, with Prince Anastasius."

"We have received an invitation before, but this is our first time doing the inviting ourselves, milady. We are now the Tenth, but this is entirely different," Rihyarda said. It seemed that Ehrenfest inviting royalty to any tea party was more or less unthinkable.

"We can't take it back, can we?" I asked.

"Of course not."

"That said, Prince Hildebrand was clearly seeking an invitation then and there, so regardless of how you handled it, I believe the end result would have been the same," Brunhilde said, adding in a mutter that the prince's retainer had been very apologetic. Driven by our inexperience, Hildebrand and I had brought suffering to our attendants by acting without the proper groundwork. It was unfortunate, to say the least.

Hartmut and Philine were summarizing our conversation to send to Ehrenfest, and while the scholars were writing our response, my attendants and I settled the details of the tea party. It was then that Cornelius, who had been standing guard outside the door, rushed in. "Lady Rozemyne, Roderick has returned with wounds!" he exclaimed.

I stood up abruptly and went straight to the common room. There, I found Charlotte and the others surrounding Roderick, who was covered in cuts and bruises.

"Roderick, I heard that you were injured," I said.

"A strong feybeast appeared while we hunted," he explained. It seemed that he had avoided the attack but ended up slamming into an apprentice knight in the process. "They sent me back so I could call for reinforcements."

I turned to Cornelius just as Wilfried and his guard knights entered the room, fully armed. "Don't worry," Wilfried said. "We'll handle this."

"Wilfried..." Apparently, he had gone off to get ready as soon as Roderick returned. I saw apprentice archknights and some of Charlotte's apprentice guard knights among his group.

"The archducal guard knights who know your method and were trained

by Lord Bonifatius are the strongest ones here," Wilfried explained. He had also been growing his mana, and he had had a lot of mana for a member of the archducal family to begin with. Since he was a boy, he was required to participate in training with the apprentice knights, so he had decided to lead the reinforcements. "You and Charlotte should guard the dorm. Your guard knights can protect Charlotte. And now, we have to go."

"Understood."

"Be safe, dear brother..." Charlotte said, her indigo eyes wavering as she saw everyone off. I saw them off as well and then turned to Roderick. His wounds looked painful, so I immediately took out my schtappe.

"May Heilschmerz's healing be granted to Roderick," I said, causing a green light to envelop him and recover his wounds. He widened his eyes a little and then looked down at his limbs; it must have been his first time being healed. "You should drink a rejuvenation potion, both for your mana and stamina."

My words must have reminded Roderick that rejuvenation potions existed at all, as he hurriedly plucked a bottle from among those lining his belt and chugged its contents. He then sighed and said, "I thank you, Lady Rozemyne. The pain has faded."

"What in the world happened...?" I asked. "Do tell which feybeast appeared."

Roderick nodded and said they had come across a massive black doglike feybeast. "It was taller than an adult, even when running on all four legs," he said. "And when it moved, the area around it morphed. I saw trees wilt and rot away, turning black right before us. It had many eyes as well—large red ones where a normal dog's eyes would be and several tiny black ones on its forehead, which changed colors when it was attacked."

"Is that not a ternisbefallen?!" Leonore cried in a sharp voice, her indigo eyes widening. Among my guard knights, she was the quietest and most scholarlike of them all; it was rare for her to shout in such a panic.

"What's a ternisbefallen?" Cornelius asked, frowning in confusion. "Is it serious...?"

Leonore nodded repeatedly, her expression as hard as stone. "It's a feybeast that grows with mana," she said. "They're similar to our local trombes, and I've read they live in the south of Yurgenschmidt. If we attack it carelessly, it'll only grow stronger!"

“What?!”

Everyone present gasped at this revelation; attempting to kill the ternisbefallen ran the risk of making it larger instead. I recalled the trombe that had used my mana to grow at an astounding rate and felt a shiver run down my spine. I rubbed my arms to comfort myself.

“But surely they would notice that their attacks are strengthening it. Plus, weapons with a Darkness blessing can hurt them, so Ehrenfest apprentice knights should be fine, right?” I asked, remembering the knights at the trombe extermination hunt.

Cornelius and Leonore turned to look at me. “Where are those weapons with the Darkness blessing?!” Cornelius exclaimed. “We must get them and follow Lord Wilfried at once!”

“What do you mean, where?” I asked. “You simply say the prayer to give your schtappe-turned-weapon the blessing. Wait. Neither of you know about this?!”

I could feel the blood draining from my face. I had assumed that the Darkness blessing was common knowledge, but Cornelius, Leonore, Judithe, and everyone else shook their heads collectively. The apprentice knights who went off to battle were in far too much danger. They would launch supportive attacks in an attempt to repel the beast, entirely unaware that they were only feeding its strength.

“M-My apologies, Lady Rozemyne. This is all because I wanted a feystone...” Roderick said, forcing the words from his throat. I gritted my teeth. He was holding back frustrated tears, convinced that his desire to give me his name had caused this, but he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“I shall go,” I declared.

“Lady Rozemyne?!”

“Sister?!”

The moment I stood up, there came a clamor of voices.

“It’s too dangerous, Lady Rozemyne! You must leave this to the apprentice knights!” Roderick exclaimed. But no matter the danger, I couldn’t entrust this situation to apprentice guard knights who didn’t even know the God of Darkness’s prayer.

“I am the High Bishop,” I said. “Everyone is going to be in danger unless I teach them the prayer to obtain this blessing. Attendants, contact the professors. I leave the dormitory to you, Charlotte!”

I turned on a dime, pumped mana into my enhancement tools, and started running straight for the dormitory's rear exit.

"Lady Rozemyne, please allow me to join you," Hartmut said as he power walked next to me. "I have trained alongside the apprentice knights so that I may protect you as well. Perhaps I may be able to buy some time while those already in battle say the prayer."

I looked up at him, and he gave me a reassuring nod. Philine, who was similarly running beside me, began to say the same, but I shot her down before she could even finish her sentence.

"You are staying here, Philine. You do not have much mana, so even if you can say the prayer, you will not be of much help."

Cornelius spoke next, with a highly troubled expression. "Please just teach us the prayer and stay in the dorm as well, Lady Rozemyne."

"The prayer is not short enough to be memorized so easily, and we do not have enough time for me to teach everyone. If you continue to complain, I will order you to stay here too!"

"But that would defeat the purpose of us going!"

"Then be quiet and hurry." I glanced over at the apprentice knights who were power walking alongside me. "Can everyone produce their highbeasts while maintaining their schtappes?"

"Of course."

"Then do so and form your weapons."

After seeing everyone take out their schtappes and morph them into weapons, I similarly turned my schtappe into a weapon—opting for a water gun—and then ordered them to repeat a prayer after me.

"O mighty and supreme God of Darkness, who rules the endless skies; O mighty Father who created the world and all things. Please hear my prayer and lend your divine strength; bless my weapon with the power to steal mana from the evil, all the mana which is yours by right; grant me your divine protection to purge the unnatural fey..."

We arrived at the back door, and Roderick, who had come with Philine, began pulling it open. I eyed that while continuing the prayer, and once outside, I used my free hand to touch my feystone and bring out my highbeast. Everyone else did the same and jumped on their own highbeasts.

"Grant ephemeral peace to the beings of the land."

As I finished my prayer, our weapons flashed for a moment and were

then engulfed in clouds of darkness. I climbed into my highbeast and turned around. There was Philine looking on with worry and Roderick biting into his lip, trying to keep the tears from streaming down his face.

“Roderick! Get in!” I shouted. “I would not want you to lose your feystone after all this has happened. I have resolved to accept your name!”

“But...”

He was slow to answer, so Philine grabbed his hand and pulled him into my Pandabus. She forced him to sit down and then smiled. “Lady Rozemyne will never lose now that she has the Darkness blessing. Did you not say that you will obtain the feystone and serve by her side? Go and get your feystone, Roderick.”

I silently applauded Philine’s expert work at getting Roderick inside; now we could leave as soon as she got out. I turned away to get my seat belt on, and while I was distracted, I heard Roderick speak in an uneasy, pleading voice.

“Philine...”

“Um, Roderick...” Philine replied. “If you do not let go, I cannot get out.”

I glanced in the rearview mirror to see that Roderick was still gripping Philine’s hand. She looked between him, the one keeping her in place, and me, the one who had ordered her to stay behind. It seemed that Roderick would feel more comfortable with company, and there was no harm in Philine riding with us.

“Philine,” I said, “could you show Roderick how to put on his seat belt?”

“Hm? May I come as well, then?” Philine asked, widening her eyes. I responded with a brisk nod; I didn’t want Roderick sitting alone in the back, worried. It was better that there be someone with him.

“Roderick is not yet formally my retainer. You are not a knight, Philine, but you must keep an eye on him. Do not allow him to leave my highbeast, no matter what.”

“Understood,” Philine replied. I could see in the rearview mirror that she was wearing a pleased smile as I started pouring mana into the steering wheel. This was going to be some dangerous one-handed driving, since I had a water gun in my other hand.

“E-Erm, Lady Rozemyne. I...”

“We’re off, Roderick!”

I interrupted Roderick, who was probably about to insist on getting out, and then took to the sky to catch up with Cornelius.

Hunting a Ternisbefallen

I accelerated toward the glow of the gathering spot. It was relatively close to the dorm, and amid the snow, the pillar of yellow light was easy to identify. I could see a black trail leading toward the magic mirror-esque barrier, tracing where the ternisbefallen had traveled, but the knights were nowhere to be seen. They must have been inside the gathering area as well.

“Going in!” Cornelius shouted as he plunged into the pillar of light. I did the same in Lessy, following after his fluttering dark-yellow cape.

It took only a moment for us to get through, and in an instant, the world around us went from one with snow to one without. However, the gathering spot was far from how I remembered it. About a quarter of the previously thriving plant life—of the rich brown trees and beautiful green grass—had been corrupted by the ternisbefallen. Even the very earth beneath us was now a swamp of black mud.

“This is awful...”

“Where is everybody?! Knights, respond!” Cornelius called out, the panic in his voice bringing me back to my senses. The ternisbefallen wasn’t here, nor were the apprentice knights who had come to hunt it.

“They must have lured the ternisbefallen elsewhere,” Leonore said calmly, maintaining her cool. “Let us leave and investigate.”

Cornelius nodded and leapt back through the surrounding light. I did the same, still pained by the state of the land.

This is going to need Flutrane’s healing later, for sure. If we leave it like this, there won’t be very much for our students to gather.

As soon as we left the gathering spot, we felt great tremors coming from elsewhere in the forest. It was so deafening that a small shriek escaped me, and I instinctively shrank back into the seat of my Pandabus. I could feel the air trembling against my skin.

“Where?!” Cornelius shouted. We flew up high and eventually spotted a trail leading to a spot deeper in the forest where several trees had just fallen. Highbeasts darted in and out of sight, rising and then flying closer to the

ground. The dark-yellow capes of their riders were clear to see.

“There!”

I hurried over to the newly made clearing and finally saw the enlarged ternisbefallen. It looked like a massive dog or wolf, just as Roderick had described it, but while he had said that it was a little taller than an adult while on four legs, it was now two or three times that size.

“It wasn’t this large before!” Roderick cried.

I nodded while eyeing it over. “It must have grown after being attacked with mana. And quite a lot of mana indeed, it seems.”

I wanted to shout that the apprentices really should have noticed what was happening before things reached this point, but I swallowed the urge. They hadn’t participated in a trombe hunt before, let alone encountered a feybeast that stole mana; there was no avoiding this kind of mistake.

Although the situation was now quite dire, it seemed the apprentice knights had at least learned that attacking the beast was dangerous. They were now flying around it, trying to keep it from causing too much more damage to the forest. Their dark-yellow capes left no room for doubt that they were Ehrenfest apprentice knights, but their numbers paled in comparison to how many had departed with Wilfried.

“This is all of them...?” I muttered to myself. “What about the apprentices who had gone gathering with Roderick?”

The ternisbefallen opened its mouth wide in an attempt to eat an apprentice that was flying in front of its face, and just a moment later, its bared yellow teeth made a loud clinking sound.

“Watch out!”

The apprentice knight flourished their cape and suddenly changed direction, avoiding the danger as though they had predicted the ternisbefallen’s movements. I was relieved, but only for the slightest moment, as from the enlarged ternisbefallen’s mouth dribbled an excess of saliva. It dripped onto the ground, morphing the earth into black sludge, causing trees to lose their foundation and collapse as the terrain distorted.

The forest was wounded with each move the ternisbefallen made. It was somewhat similar to a trombe in that regard, but at least trombes were locked in place with their roots. The four swift legs of a ternisbefallen yielded to no such restrictions.

“Lady Rozemyne!” Philine cried. “The ternisbefallen!”

Only then did I realize that, in my contemplation, I had lost sight of the ternisbefallen. I scanned my surroundings at once, but by the time I spotted it again, its massive red eyes were already locked on me. Roderick had said that the eyes on its forehead were black, but that was no longer the case. They were now red, blue, green, and more, as if reflecting the mana the beast had consumed... and they were all looking at me.

A shiver ran down my spine, and cold sweat seeped from my every pore. I knew those eyes well—they were the eyes of a feybeast that viewed me as nothing but prey.

The ternisbefallen snorted, no longer paying any mind to the apprentice knights flitting around it, and rushed straight at me. Whether this was because it could tell who had the most mana or because it had realized the knights weren't going to attack it again, I had no idea.

"Lady Rozemyne! Go up!" Leonore shouted. "Soar into the air, higher than the ternisbefallen can leap!"

I pulled my steering wheel back and launched into the air, but the ternisbefallen refused to give up so easily. It stood on its two hind legs and then bounded upward, trying to catch me in its mouth. The blood drained from my face. I could see its thick front legs through the window of my highbeast and smell the stench from its wide-open mouth.

"Ahhhhhh!"

"Gaaaaaah!"

As my two passengers screamed, I slammed my foot down on the accelerator and started aimlessly firing my water gun through the open window. My shots all missed their target, and the ternisbefallen hadn't lost any momentum. Its yellowed teeth were clearly visible. I had never become so well acquainted with the inside of a beast's mouth before, and its raw breath was more terrifying than I ever could have imagined.

I'm gonna get eaten!

I was so stricken with fear that my skin had gone pallid, but still I continued pouring mana into the steering wheel. And then—

SNAP!

I heard the beast champ its teeth. It must have missed us because its front legs suddenly flipped back, and a beat later, it let out a loud yelp.

"Got it!" Judithe cried energetically.

I turned around, and only then did I realize what had happened. Judithe

had struck the ternisbefallen in the face, then Cornelius had assailed it with a full-power blow from the side.

“Lady Rozemyne!” Hartmut shouted as he flew over in a hurry. I had been gripping the steering wheel so desperately that I could no longer move my hands from it.

“It’s okay,” I croaked. “I’m fine.”

Wilfried rushed over as well with his guard knights in tow. “Rozemyne!” he shouted. “You can’t just leap into danger like this!”

“I only came to teach the apprentices a prayer...”

“All we need to do is distract the beast until the professors arrive, and your being here only makes that harder for us. The last thing we need is you getting eaten or collapsing out of nowhere!”

He was correct, so I apologized without hesitation. “At least let me bless everyone’s weapons. Once I’ve done that, I’ll return to the dorm.”

“Alright.”

Cornelius and the others had gathered up in the air as well, and as I looked around, I realized that my initial suspicion was correct—there weren’t enough people here. There were no children of the former Veronica faction, nor were there the other apprentices who had departed with Wilfried.

“Wilfried, what happened to the rest of the apprentice knights?” I asked.

“They’re resting. We figured this was going to be a long fight, so we’re operating on rotation,” Wilfried said before shooting a rott in the direction of the forest. As the red light stretched out, apprentice knights who had apparently been scattered among the trees resting came flying over.

I turned to my retainers. “Cornelius, Leonore, Judithe, Hartmut—the beast is dangerous now that it has grown so large. Please distract it as Wilfried and the others did until I have finished the prayers. I will teach the apprentices here.”

“Understood.”

Cornelius’s group swooped down to the ternisbefallen. I watched them go for a second and then gazed across the gathered apprentice knights. Those who had been resting were divided into two groups—the students belonging to the former Veronica faction were centered around Matthias, while the rest were with Traugott.

“The situation seems to have changed greatly from when Roderick was

last here," I said. "I would like an explanation."

All those gathered around Traugott turned to look at him, and not with particularly friendly eyes. He had become rather meek late last year, while Justus was serving as his attendant, but he had regained his confidence after learning my mana compression method and increasing his capacity. Now, he was hanging his head in silence. It was enough for me to realize that he was responsible for the ternisbefallen becoming so large.

"Traugott," Wilfried said. "Explain yourself."

Traugott froze and then nodded. "It would have destroyed our entire gathering spot if we had let it continue its rampage there," he said, "which is why we've been guiding it deeper into the forest. And, as for its size... It grew so large because I attacked it at full power."

It seemed that, upon racing to the gathering spot with Wilfried, Traugott had discovered the apprentice knights flying around the ternisbefallen, leading it farther into the forest without engaging it. Matthias had been quick to notice that the beast was stealing mana and ordered all those in his group not to attack it under any circumstance, but Traugott had not been so perceptive. Unsure of the reason for their pacifism, he had decided to save the other knights by killing the ternisbefallen in one mighty blow.

Matthias had of course realized that there was nothing he or the other reinforcements could do to help and shouted for Traugott to wait, but Traugott didn't hear and launched his full-power attack nonetheless. It was then that the ternisbefallen, which had only been a little bigger than an adult, had swelled even further in size. For a moment, it looked as though it might explode from the pressure of the mana, but its shape soon stabilized, and it ended up over twice as large as before.

"As I reeled in confusion, an ordonnanz arrived from Lady Charlotte's apprentice guard knight," Traugott continued. "It explained what the feybeast was and that we needed weapons blessed by Darkness to attack it."

Around the same time, Wilfried had received an ordonnanz from Rihyarda, saying that I had flown off to teach the blessing and that the professors had been summoned.

"From there, Lord Wilfried took command," Matthias added, looking at the ternisbefallen. "We lured the beast away from our gathering spot, taking care not to attack it, and started to buy time. We therefore had enough leeway to drink rejuvenation potions and recover in rotation."

I examined the gathered knights as he spoke and noticed that some were still exhausted and wounded. “We should be fine if we continue to buy time for the professors to arrive,” I said. “Now, I shall reward you all for your efforts with Heilschmerz’s healing.”

My schtappe was already transformed, so I used my ring to heal the apprentice knights instead. I tended to them one by one, each time allowing the green light of a blessing to shoot from my ring’s feystone and rain down upon them.

“We thank you, Lady Rozemyne.”

The pain must have faded, as even the slouched-over knights straightened their backs.

“Now then, please take out your weapons,” I said. “Once the blessing is dispelled, you cannot receive it again that day, so make sure to wait until the ternisbefallen is truly beaten.”

“We don’t even know how to dispel it,” Wilfried said, which made me smile as I repeated the prayer from before.

“O mighty and supreme God of Darkness, who rules the endless skies; O mighty Father who created the world and all things...”

The apprentice knights repeated my words while staring at their weapons. I could see Cornelius and the others restraining the ternisbefallen far beneath us.

“Please hear my prayer and lend your divine strength; bless my weapon with the power to steal mana from the evil, all the mana which is yours by right; grant me your divine protection to purge the unnatural fey...”

I closed my eyes, holding back my urge to speed up the prayer even a little bit. I couldn’t allow my focus to falter even for the slightest moment.

“Grant ephemeral peace to the beings of the land.”

When I opened my eyes, I saw that everyone’s weapons were black with the power of Darkness. Some were balking at the very sight.

“Your attacks will now steal mana from the ternisbefallen,” I explained. “You said that your aim is simply to buy time, but if possible, I would like its feystone. To that end, I would appreciate it if you used wide attacks to sever its limbs.”

“Rozemyne, do you really think we’re in a position to do that?” Wilfried asked with a sigh and shook his head. “Now, as I’m sure you’ve gathered from the fact that we’ve been up here uninterrupted, the ternisbefallen can

only reach so high. Stay up here where we can see you, and don’t get close enough for its attacks to reach you.”

“Right.”

Cornelius and the others rejoined us, perhaps having noticed the flash as everyone’s weapons were imbued with Darkness. The ternisbefallen below turned its attention to us and jumped again, as if detecting how much high-quality mana was now gathered in one place, but we were high up enough that not even its front legs could reach us. Still, the sight of a beast with glowing eyes leaping toward us with its mouth wide open was terrifying.

“Leonore is the only one among us to have read about ternisbefallens and their attributes,” I said. “All of you, follow her instructions—especially you, Traugott. Is that understood?”

“Yes...” Traugott muttered, hanging his head.

Wilfried gave a sympathetic exhale. “Don’t be too hard on Traugott. He just didn’t know how ternisbefallens work.”

The problem isn’t that he didn’t know—it’s that he doesn’t follow orders!

As much as I wanted to voice my thoughts on the matter, I decided to keep my mouth shut. Now that I had blessed the apprentice knights’ weapons, they could handle the rest of the fight themselves, and my work here was halfway done. I still needed to heal the earth, although given what was lurking below us, that didn’t have to be done right away.

As I was lost in thought, Leonore was taking command, and she turned to give me my orders next. “Now, Lady Rozemyne...”

“You want me to fight too?” I asked. “I thought I was told to stay here in the sky.”

“You have more mana than any of us and can attack from the greatest distance—is there a reason you should not fight?”

It seemed that she wanted to use all of the manpower available to her. It was a logical decision, and although I was a little surprised to see her so focused on defeating the enemy as efficiently as possible, I was glad to actually be given a job.

That means I’m being of use to everyone.

“Lady Rozemyne, please use your water gun to shoot the ternisbefallen from outside its reach,” Leonore said. “Judithe, Hartmut, stay by her side no matter what.”

“Understood!” I replied enthusiastically as I readied my water gun.

Leonore gave a small smile in response and then looked to Traugott.

“Traugott, work with Cornelius to detach the ternisbefallen’s limbs. You know the attack that he and Angelica often use, correct?”

“But I...”

Traugott was about to respond but then fell silent; his failure from earlier must have been weighing on his mind. He shut his eyes tight and shook his head, but Leonore had no intention of permitting him to flee. She continued, in a quiet voice:

“You and Lord Wilfried are the only ones here with enough mana to match Cornelius. If you believe that you have failed, then now is your chance to make up for it and try again.”

Traugott seemed to shrink back with each word, and all eyes were on him—that is, until Wilfried stepped forward protectively. “I can only copy what I’ve seen, but I will join Cornelius,” he said.

Leonore gave Traugott another look, this time seeming more expectant... but he said nothing. Instead, he just lowered his gaze.

Cornelius, who had been watching this exchange in silence, let out a sigh and smiled at Wilfried. “You may put your all into your attacks, Lord Wilfried. I will match your power.”

Our game plan was going to be similar to the one used during the trombe extermination: I would target the ternisbefallen with long-range attacks, and once it was weakened, the apprentice knights would attack all at once. Everyone would then back off, which was my cue to rain arrows upon the beast. I just needed to be careful not to hit any of the apprentice knights in the process.

I’ve been given the position that Ferdinand was in before, so it must be pretty important, right? Like, super important.

It certainly didn’t seem like the kind of position to give someone who had never been through proper training before. Before I even had an opportunity to consider backing out, however, Leonore threw up her fist and the apprentice knights scattered. The ternisbefallen’s eyes circled all over the place, as though it was debating which highbeast to chase after.

Eww! Talk about gross!

I aimed my gun at the ternisbefallen far below, feeling goosebumps rise all over my skin, and pictured Ferdinand obliterating the trombe as clearly as I could.

This is my chance. I'm going to show everyone just how hard-boiled I really am!

"Lady Rozemyne!" Philine called. "Leonore just gave the signal!" She had been keeping an eye out for me.

I turned to Judithe and Hartmut, who were guarding Lessy from either side, and then fired my water gun at the ternisbefallen with a loud, "Hyaaah!" Because I had been visualizing the attack that Ferdinand had used, the mana being shot out of my black water gun turned into equally black arrows, which split apart and rained down on the beast in a massive flurry.

"Grah!" Judithe cried, launching her own attack right after mine. Her black stone flew through the air, but it seemed as though she had made a mistake of some sort; rather than going toward the ternisbefallen—which I had assumed was an easy target, considering its size—the stone looked as though it would miss entirely.

All of a sudden, the feybeast dodged my attack... and moved straight into the path of the stone that Judithe had launched. It struck the beast, which yelped in pain.

"But why...?" I asked.

"I need to be the best when it comes to long-range attacks, Lady Rozemyne. Gotta predict where the enemy will go!" Judithe said proudly before landing a second hit with another black stone. Of course, my attack had missed again.

Hmph!

Senselessly annoyed that none of my attacks were hitting the ternisbefallen, I started firing shot after shot with the best aim I could muster. It dodged each one, as if gloating that it had a perfect read on my technique, while Judithe's attacks continued to land.

I hate this!

Of course, I wasn't the only one whose attacks were missing—all the eyes on the ternisbefallen's forehead allowed it to take in information from every direction, and it was extremely agile. The problem was that everyone else seemed to hit the beast at least on occasion; I was the only person missing every shot.

"Lady Rozemyne, you don't appear to have landed a single attack," Philine observed. Her words stuck into my heart like daggers, and while I

wanted to shout at her not to remind me, I continued focusing on the ternisbefallen.

“It seems to be because the ternisbefallen is trying to dodge your attacks in particular,” Roderick added quietly. I nodded in agreement; its large red eyes were locked on me and absolutely refused to stray elsewhere. It almost seemed as though the beast believed it would be fine as long as it dodged my attacks.

I’m the only one who keeps missing because it’s focused on me! Look at someone else already!

“If only we could obscure its vision! Then my attacks would land too!” I exclaimed, furious.

“Obscure its vision?” Roderick asked calmly. “How would we do that?”

“Well, um... Er...”

It was such a massive feybeast that no ideas immediately came to mind.

Something to block its eyes, something to block its eyes... If only we had, like, a big piece of cloth with us.

It would only be a temporary solution—there was no way we could wrap the cloth around the ternisbefallen’s eyes and then fasten it behind its head—but a temporary solution was all we needed. Simply dropping the cloth from above would serve that purpose nicely.

A distraction like that would blind the beast for at least a second, which is plenty of time for me to get an attack in. I just need some cloth big enough to cover its entire body...

“Oh!” I exclaimed. “I know a divine instrument that will do just the trick. *Rucken*!”

“A divine instrument...?” Philine repeated, stunned.

I nodded in response as my water gun returned to being a schtappe. Much to my surprise, this didn’t dispel the blessing as the knights during the trombe hunt had said it would—instead, my schtappe remained black. I closed my eyes. There was a spell that Ferdinand had taught me to use for defensive purposes.

“*Finsumhang*!” I said, and my schtappe turned into black cloth decorated with flecks of gold that sparkled like the night sky. Roderick pointed at it, dazed.

“Lady Rozemyne... What is that?”

“The God of Darkness’s cape,” I replied. “With this, we can block the

ternisbefallen’s vision.”

This was a cape that had the power to absorb and seize control of mana. It was very likely that the Darkness blessing would result in the mana being sent to the gods instead of me, but that was fine in my eyes; the only thing I cared about was reducing how much mana the ternisbefallen had.

I spread out the cape as if creating a miniature night sky and dropped it above the ternisbefallen’s head. My arrows would only ever shoot where I had initially aimed them, but I could spread and move the cape at will, which was apparently more than the ternisbefallen could dodge. It froze in place once the black cloth had covered its many eyes and started pawing at its face in an attempt to restore its vision.

“Yes! Now it won’t be able to avoid my attacks!” I declared, clenching my fists with enthusiasm.

Philine placed a hand on her cheek and gave me an inquisitive look. “But, Lady Rozemyne... How will you attack when you just turned your schtappe into a cape and threw it at the beast?”

“GAAAH! MY WATER GUUUN!”

As I cradled my head, trying to ease the failure-induced agony, Wilfried and Cornelius shouted words of approval.

“Great job, Rozemyne! You’ve stunned it!”

“Now! Everyone, attack at once! Aim for its hind legs!”

Twenty-some highbeasts soared freely through the air, and their riders launched a barrage of attacks on the ternisbefallen as it struggled to remove the cape from its head. They focused on its hind legs with their Darkness-imbued weapons, and the beast shrieked as blood poured from its wounds and ate into the earth. The ternisbefallen became more and more injured as the fight went on, and as I watched everyone continue their assault, I could barely hold back the urge to cry.

Everyone looks so cool, but no! This is wrong! Give me back my chance to show off!

Wilfried had filled his sword with mana so he could attack whenever he was ready, and now its blade was engulfed in a black cloud. As he raised it high into the air, I noticed the lion crest on the hilt. I could only assume he had fashioned it to match his schtappe.

“Everyone, fall back!” Cornelius called, having already raised his own black, mana-filled sword. The attack looked a little smaller than the one he

had launched last year, presumably because he was matching Wilfried's strength.

The apprentices flew into the air, moved into formation between the ternisbefallen and me, and then readied their shields to protect me from the oncoming shock wave. I turned Lessy around and gripped the steering wheel tight.

"Here we go! HRAAAH!"

Wilfried pumped himself up with a battle cry as he started toward the ground, building up momentum, and then swung his sword down hard. A mana-packed wave of Darkness shot from his blade and closed in on the ternisbefallen's back right leg.

"HYAAAH!"

Cornelius yelled in unison as he launched a similar wave attack at the beast's other hind leg. The two waves collided with a resounding *boom*, sending a rippling shock wave of energy through the air. Some of it reached me in my Pandabus, but because we were so far away and the apprentice knights had absorbed so much of the blow, it wasn't anything special. It probably helped that I had already experienced far more powerful shock waves from the all-out attacks of Ferdinand and the others.

So? Did they get it?!

Once the shock wave had passed, I squinted down at the ternisbefallen. It seemed that the waves had struck their targets, as the beast was screeching in pain, its back right leg having been blown right off.

"Yes!" I cried just as the ternisbefallen leapt back. It was moving like a feral animal—as was probably expected—but it seemed as though it didn't feel the pain of having its leg so suddenly removed or the blood that was now gushing from the stump.

The cape over the beast's face had seemingly been knocked away by the blast. Its now exposed eyes were overwhelmed with anger, and they locked on Wilfried, who just happened to be in its sights. The blood drained from my face; again, those were the eyes of a predator that had found its prey.

"Wilfried! Fly up!" I cried.

Having most likely heard my shout, Wilfried shot up into the air. However, perhaps because he had used too much mana in the attack moments prior, his highbeast moved much too slowly. The apprentice knights moved at once to protect him, but the furious ternisbefallen, hungry

for mana to heal itself, was faster than them all. Even with its back leg severed, it was mere moments away from catching up with him.

“Traugott!” Cornelius barked. His blade was glowing once again, indicating that he had refilled it with mana. Meanwhile, Traugott responded to the call and plunged toward the ground, his sword in hand. I could see him filling his own blade with mana during the descent.

A sudden flash came from Cornelius’s Darkness-imbued sword, and the resulting wave burst against the ternisbefallen’s throat. The beast lost its balance, and that was when Traugott swept past Wilfried and unleashed his own swing at its stomach.

“Graaah!” Traugott roared. His mana hit the shock wave that Cornelius’s attack had caused, and an explosion soon followed. The resulting shock wave was significantly dampened by the time it reached us, but I could tell from the trees flattening in a circle around Cornelius and the massive dust cloud just how strong the attack had been.

Wilfried was knocked further up in the air when the shock wave hit him, and the knights who had canceled their shields to help him were likewise blown every which way. I squeezed my eyes shut, stomped on Lessy’s brakes as hard as I could, and poured in my mana at maximum speed as I tried to endure it.

Once the shock wave had faded entirely, I finally opened my eyes. There was a massive crater in the ground, and inside it, the ternisbefallen was lying on its side. Its legs were twitching, but it appeared that it couldn’t stand up.

“We did it!”

“Stay on guard!” Leonore barked, silencing the cheering apprentice knights. Cornelius and Traugott stabbed the ternisbefallen all over with practiced movements until it stopped moving entirely.

“Come get your ingredients!” Traugott eventually called, waving everyone over. The apprentice knights flew down to join him by the ternisbefallen, and I did the same in my Pandabus.

“Ingredients are distributed according to participation,” Cornelius said to Wilfried and me, explaining how the apprentice knights were rewarded after helping to slay a feybeast. This time, Cornelius was the MVP, followed by Wilfried and then Traugott. I had received a fair few points too for blocking its vision and halting its movement with the cape.

“Cornelius, don’t forget how much Matthias and the others contributed by guiding the ternisbefallen away from the gathering spot while waiting for reinforcements,” Wilfried noted.

“And don’t forget about Leonore,” I added. “She was the only one who had studied documents on feybeasts not relevant to the Interduchy Tournament.”

Cornelius nodded with a smile.

“I would like ingredients for a feystone that Roderick can use to swear his name to me,” I said. “I don’t need anything else in particular, so I will take whatever is of a high quality.”

“Might I suggest eyes from its forehead, then?” Leonore suggested. “The mana that the beast absorbs from attacks is divided between them, so I believe they will serve as excellent ingredients.”

At her advice, I settled for the ternisbefallen’s Wind and Earth eyes. “There you go then, Roderick. Go acquire the eyes and make a name-swearing feystone worthy of giving to me.”

“Lady Rozemyne...”

Roderick looked at me, clearly moved, then nodded firmly and climbed out of my Pandabus. I watched him go over to the ternisbefallen and sighed with relief; I could pluck the feathers from a bird and skin an animal after being forced to help my family in the lower city, but I wasn’t good at it, nor did I enjoy doing it.

And gouging out eyes? Yeah, no thanks.

“Lady Rozemyne, how does one dispel the blessing?” Cornelius asked. “We can’t collect the ingredients otherwise, as the Darkness will steal the mana from them while we are gathering.”

I snapped back to reality and looked over everyone’s weapons. “You do know that, once dispelled, you can’t regain the God of Darkness’s blessing for the rest of the day, right?”

“I don’t think we’ll need the blessing any more times today,” Wilfried replied, and the apprentice knights nodded in agreement.

“Repeat after me then: *entwaffnung*.”

Everyone said the word to dispel their blessings, and as I watched the Darkness fade from their weapons, I remembered that I hadn’t yet retrieved the cape I had thrown. I looked over at everyone harvesting from the ternisbefallen and said that I would only be a moment.

“Hold on,” Cornelius said. “Allow me to fetch it for you.”

I waved a hand dismissively. “You have your own work to do here, no? I can manage with Judithe and Hartmut.” As he had contributed the most, he also needed to gather the most ingredients himself.

Leonore had been helping Cornelius harvest his ingredients, but when she heard my intention, she stood up. “I shall go with Lady Rozemyne,” she said. “Cornelius, please gather our share of the materials as well.”

“Right. Look after Lady Rozemyne for me.”

I climbed back into Lessy and went to retrieve the God of Darkness’s cape that I had thrown onto the ternisbefallen. Judithe, Hartmut, and now

Leonore were accompanying me.

"So you truly can form the divine instruments, Lady Rozemyne. I was aware from your reports that you have done so in your practical lessons, but I am truly moved to have seen it with my own eyes," Hartmut said, nodding with satisfaction. As far as he was concerned, it had made coming all this way worthwhile—although I found that strange, considering how often he visited the temple these days.

"Have you not grown used to seeing them at the temple, Hartmut?" I asked.

"I may go to the temple for work, but I rarely have an opportunity to see the divine instruments."

I saw and even touched the divine instruments all the time when offering up my mana, but I usually did this early in the morning or right before bed, since Fran had encouraged me not to keep Hartmut and the others waiting. This meant that neither Hartmut nor Philine had seen the divine instruments all that much, despite them visiting the temple so often.

Maybe I should make some opportunities for them to see the instruments...

I picked up the black cape, but what I saw beneath it made me gasp. The spot on the ground where it had landed was drained of mana, and although it wasn't black mud anymore, the earth was hard and dried out.

Sorry! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to do this!

I hurriedly dispelled the blessing and unmorphed my schtappe, and it was then that I remembered that I still needed to perform the healing ritual. It was probably wiser for me to heal the gathering spot before this random area in the forest, though; despite missing every shot, I had spent a hefty amount of mana blasting away at the ternisbefallen.

Healing the gathering spot should probably come first... Right?

I turned to consult Cornelius and then froze in place. The sight alone was too much for me, and I was forced to avert my eyes.

"Lady Rozemyne, is something wrong?" Leonore asked.

"I would like to heal the gathering spot. It will be some time before the ingredients have all been harvested, correct?" I said with an innocent grin, not wanting to admit that I was simply too scared to go near the half-disassembled ternisbefallen. "Gruesome" didn't even begin to describe it.

"What exactly do you mean by 'heal'?" Leonore asked, looking

confused. I was just copying what had been done after the trombe extermination, but it seemed that she didn't know this, since she hadn't been there.

"There is a ritual to refill the earth that the ternisbefallen ravaged with mana."

"Is such a thing possible?"

This question came not from Leonore, but from Hartmut, who spoke in wide-eyed surprise. As it turned out, he often needed brewing ingredients as a scholar, and seeing the gathering spot in such a state had made him quite worried.

"It is a task that the temple carries out following a trombe hunt," I said, "and I am the High Bishop."

It's not that I'm trying to get away from the harvesting! I'm just the only one who can perform the healing ritual.

Healing and Reinforcements

After a brief discussion, it was decided that I would go to heal the gathering spot. Three guards wouldn't be enough for such a task, so we opted to bring with us the idling apprentice knights who had barely helped defeat the beast and quickly obtained their minor share of the ingredients.

We entered the yellow glow of the gathering spot and saw the clear line between the lush greenery and the black sludge where the ternisbefallen had rampaged. In total, about a quarter of the clearing was entirely destroyed. It was a serious amount of damage.

"This is nightmarish," one of the apprentices said. "We need to remedy this havoc, else our studies are going to suffer."

I nodded in agreement while pondering whether I could even handle performing this healing ritual. Unlike the one after the trombe attack, I actually needed to grow plants to some degree; otherwise, the students would immediately face problems in class.

"I will heal enough that Ehrenfest does not fall behind in its classes," I said. "I trust that you will all step in if any feybeasts appear."

"Right!"

Upon landing in the gathering spot, I turned to look at Philine in the back seat. "Philine, you must not leave," I said. "Wait here until my return."

"Understood."

And so, I climbed out of my Pandabus alone. I didn't want to step into the swamp of black sludge, so I had stopped right before it.

"We retainers shall stay by Lady Rozemyne. Everyone, secure the perimeter," Leonore instructed, having the highbeast-riding apprentice knights disperse and stand guard. She and Hartmut were standing to my left and right, respectively, while Judithe guarded my back. We couldn't see any feybeasts around at present—they had all fled while the ternisbefallen was rampaging and flinging black sludge everywhere—but we were better safe than sorry.

I formed my schtappe, closed my eyes to concentrate, and then

visualized Flutrane's staff. It had a long, slender grip dotted with small feystones, and at the very tip was a large green feystone about the size of an adult's fist surrounded by a frame of gold. It was the first divine instrument I had used.

"*Streitkolben*."

No sooner had I spoken the word than Flutrane's staff appeared in my grip. I stuck it into the ground, took it firmly in both hands, and slowly began pouring mana into it.

"O Goddess of Water Flutrane, bringer of healing and change. O twelve goddesses who serve by her side. Please hear my prayer and lend me your divine strength. Grant me the power to heal your sister, the Goddess of Earth Geduldh, who has been wounded by those who serve evil. I shall offer this divine note to thee, casting ripples of the highest order. May you fill the world with your royal color to mine own heart's content."

The large feystone embedded in the staff emitted a bright flash. I was familiar with this feeling of a storm growing around me as my mana stirred. My hair was blown by the wind, and as my clothes rustled, I knew that the healing ritual would succeed.

A moment later, there came a second flash from the ground beneath me, and light the same color as the staff's feystone began running across the earth in lines. They were all of uniform thickness, and they flowed from the base of the staff like water running through canals.

“Huh?! Wha?!”

Surprised cries came from all around me, and I stared at the green light, debating whether to cancel the ritual. This was different from the one I had performed after the trombe appearance—back then, my mana had spread across the black earth at once and caused tiny sprouts to pop up. These green lines were completely new to me.

What should I do...?

The green light continued flowing as I agonized, and soon enough, the lines had formed a complete magic circle. It must have been here to begin with, as it was exactly as large as the gathering spot.

“Lady Rozemyne, I will record the pattern of this magic circle. Details of it are going to be necessary for my report,” Hartmut said. As the only scholar here who could move freely, he soared up into the air on his highbeast.

There was another flash, this time from the magic circle, and the black sludge left behind by the ternisbefallen vanished in a rush of steam as though it had suddenly evaporated. Auburn clay covered the land underneath, but only for a few seconds; mana soon filled the ground and replaced it with dark earth.

This is a bit weird, but at least it seems like the healing is working...

Small sprouts began to bloom atop the dark earth. It seemed that the healing ritual was working as expected, and with much relief, I started pouring in more mana. The plants needed to grow to form the herbs and such needed for classes.

Grow! Grow! Growww!

“The sprouts...” Leonore whispered in shock.

As the sprouts bloomed one after another, the magic circle on the ground seemed to rise up into the air ever so slightly. I doubted my eyes at first, but a closer look revealed that it was indeed floating the width of two fingers above the ground. It continued to rise—I could tell from the way it was moving up the staff—and the sprouts appeared to be growing to match its pace.

“Ooh!” one of the apprentices cried in awe. “This is amazing!”

“I’ve never seen a ritual like this before!” added another.

You’re not the only one!

I gritted my teeth and swallowed back the urge to yell. The staff was

sucking out more of my mana than I expected—so much that I wondered whether I would even have any left by the time the sprouts had grown enough to provide herbs.

That could prove dangerous. I need to do something before it reaches that point.

I removed one hand from the staff and reached for the feystones and bottles hanging from my hip. There was the ultra-nasty potion I had in reserve, but I couldn't quite get it. I probably wouldn't have been able to open it with one hand either.

"Leonore, hand me a potion from my belt," I said.

Leonore, who had been watching the sprouts grow with widened eyes, looked over at me with a start and then frowned upon seeing my face. "Lady Rozemyne, you are pushing yourself quite hard, are you not?"

"I need the bottle with the green feystone. Hurry. I dare not stop in the middle of this."

Leonore opened her mouth to say something only to close it again and simply purse her lips at me. She retrieved the bottle I had requested, opened it, and then placed it into my free hand. I chugged its contents at once. The taste was as awful as ever—it burned my nose, numbed my tongue, and made tears well up in my eyes. I wanted nothing more than to wash it away, but I had nothing on hand that could serve that purpose.

Gah! This vile potion is going to kill me before it even kicks in!

I knew that the terrible flavor reflected just how effective its rejuvenation properties were, but even as my mana started to regenerate, the staff sucked it right out of me again. I managed to keep the flow steady nonetheless, and the plants and trees grew before our eyes.

"Ooh!" Judithe exclaimed from behind me. The trees and such were growing as fast as a trombe. The magic circle passed my calves, my knees, and then came up all the way to my thighs. Once it reached my hips, some of the plants stopped growing any further. I assumed this meant they were tall enough already, and since the magic circle no longer needed to pour mana into them, its ascent began to accelerate.

Once the magic circle reached the top of Flutrane's staff, I saw a stream of mana flowing directly from the green feystone. The stream pushed the massive glowing magic circle of green lines higher and higher, and the trees grew along with it. Branches formed and diverged, leaves grew in

abundance, and some even sprouted flowers.

“Lady Rozemyne! This is amazing!”

By the time all of the plant life in the gathering spot was back to normal, the magic circle had risen to the highest point of the cylindrical area. It flashed one final time, emitting a bright green light, and then vanished. I no longer needed to provide any mana, so I slumped over, leaning on Flutrane’s staff to support myself.

“Healing’s done...” I said, exhausted.

“I truly cannot believe it,” Leonore said. “Have you been doing this for the temple all this time?”

“In the temple, I stop with the sprouts. But this is Ehrenfest’s gathering spot—an important place for classes—so I devoted even more mana to it. I am glad everything is back to normal.”

The scholar course required ingredients for their classes, but they weren’t the only ones. Knights depended on the gathering spot too, since they needed rejuvenation potions.

“Amazing! This is all thanks to you, Lady Rozemyne!” Judithe chirped. She turned around with a broad smile across her lips, but her expression dropped the instant she saw me. “Lady Rozemyne! You look so sick!”

“The healing consumed more mana than I expected,” I replied. “I needed to drink a rejuvenation potion, and I may have overexerted myself a little. In fact, my head is kind of spinning...” It certainly didn’t help that I had so little experience being without mana. My body couldn’t keep up with the unusual flow.

“Let’s hurry back to the dormitory. Okay?”

“But I need to fly Roderick back. We should go back to the ternisbefallen and—”

“Don’t worry about that; I’ll explain the circumstances via ordonnanz. Your health is more important than Roderick’s convenience, Lady Rozemyne.”

Leonore gave a brisk nod of agreement and raised a fist to gather the apprentice knights. “Lady Rozemyne is feeling unwell, so we shall return to the dormitory posthaste,” she said. “Half of you will accompany her as guards, while the others will return to assist with the gathering. Philine, produce your own highbeast. Lady Rozemyne, please put your highbeast and the divine instrument away. I will fly you to the dormitory.”

It was much too risky for me to use my own highbeast—there was a good chance that I would pass out on our way back to the dormitory and end up in a fatal freefall. Leonore must have realized this, and she was now shouting out orders in preparation for our return trip.

Once everything was ready, Leonore picked me up and climbed onto her highbeast. Before we could depart, however, something burst into the gathering spot. Leonore tightened her arms around me, and the surrounding apprentices produced their schtappes as more and more black-clothed individuals came into view.

“Lady Rozemyne!”

From amid the apparent strangers, a familiar voice called out to me. It was Rauffen, and his blue cape caught the wind as he rushed over on his highbeast. Accompanying him were a squadron from the Sovereign Knight’s Order—I could tell this from their black capes—and several professors, among whom was Hirschur.

“I came with the Sovereign Knight’s Order to deal with the ternisbefallen,” Rauffen said, not even dismounting his highbeast. “Where is it?!”

I glanced up at Leonore, then turned back to Rauffen and said, “We killed it.” They had come all this way for us, but the hunt was already over. Our students were busy harvesting ingredients as we spoke.

“I see. May I return to my laboratory, then?” Hirschur asked.

“Hold on, Hirschur. Ehrenfest may not be in danger anymore, but we need to figure out how a ternisbefallen ended up on the Academy’s grounds in the first place,” Rauffen replied, not even sparing a glance for the professors who were now holding Hirschur in place. “And you.” He fixed me with a grimace and shook his head. “You’re being far too casual about this. How did any of you even manage to kill a ternisbefallen? Students shouldn’t know how to use black weapons.”

He must have been referring to the God of Darkness’s blessing. Cornelius and the others hadn’t known about it, and I hadn’t seen it mentioned in Eckhart’s or Ferdinand’s notes, so it seemed safe to conclude that one did not learn about it during Royal Academy classes. Rauffen’s confusion was understandable, but there was a perfectly reasonable explanation.

“I am the High Bishop of Ehrenfest,” I explained.

“And...?” Rauffen replied.

“I am good at saying prayers.”

“Prayers?”

Rauffen and the other professors furrowed their brows, confused. Maybe the knights used spells for their black weapons instead of prayers, but such a detail was the least of my concerns. I was feeling sick; I just wanted to get back to the dormitory and sleep.

“I used a prayer to obtain the God of Darkness’s blessing, which our apprentice knights then used to kill the ternisbefallen,” I said. “If you find that hard to believe, I would recommend that you meet with our other students, who are currently retrieving ingredients from its body. Now, if you will excuse me, I wish to hurry back to my dormitory.”

I was about to leave when Rauffen said, “Wait a moment, Lady Rozemyne. Ternisbefallens drain the earth wherever they go, and we followed its black trail into here. Why, then, is this gathering spot untouched?”

“The gods helped. I am the High Bishop of Ehrenfest,” I repeated, now holding one hand to my head in an attempt to stop the world from spinning around me.

Rauffen must have interpreted my response as an attempt to evade the question, as he narrowed his eyes into a glare. “You keep leaning back on your status as Ehrenfest’s High Bishop, but the temple doesn’t have power like that. What did you do, Lady Rozemyne?”

“I performed a healing ritual. Ehrenfest needs this gathering spot, so I put my all into restoring it. Of course, I dared not overstep and touch the land outside of the barrier, since that is all under Sovereign management.”

Such was my way of saying they could handle the rest themselves; my only concern was ensuring that the Ehrenfest students wouldn’t struggle with their classes. In truth, I had also wanted to heal the patch of earth that I had accidentally drained with the God of Darkness’s cape, but now that the professors were involved, doing that secretly was out of the question. They would just need to heal it along with the rest of the land the ternisbefallen had ravaged.

“Those of the temple are responsible for healing the earth—that much is true,” said an elderly professor who had come to my highbeast creation class. He stroked his chin and peered down at me. “But how did you

perform the ritual when there is no divine instrument here?”

“I simply made one. Is that not the obvious solution when one needs something one does not have?” I replied lazily, feeling too sick and desperate to leave to muster anything else. I would understand their surprise if we were blue priests without schtappes, but nobles could just make the instruments themselves.

“You can make Flutrane’s staff too?!” Rauffen exclaimed. “Not just Leidenschaft’s spear and Schutzaria’s shield?!”

“The process is the same for them all—simply imagine the instrument and say the relevant chant.” The important thing was to thoroughly visualize what kind of tool the divine instrument you wanted to create was. Having a clear mental image was just as necessary when forming a weapon, so it was all the same to me.

“I know the temple performs healing rituals, but why is all the plant life back to normal too?” a Sovereign knight asked.

“I don’t know what to say. Is that not what a healing ritual normally does?”

It seemed that even Sovereign priests were unable to regrow plants. It made some sense, now that I thought about it—back when the former blue priest Shikza had attempted to do the ritual, simply attempting to grow some grass had proven too much for him, but there was no need for me to mention that here.

“And why do you know the spell for morphing schtappes into staves?” Rauffen asked. “Specialty weapons are taught in the knight course, not second-year classes.”

He was correct in that regard. Morphing my schtappe into a staff wasn’t something that I had learned from Ferdinand either, since he had only ever taught me defensive spells. Indeed, the source of my knowledge was far more peculiar.

“I served a tour of duty in the Raise Angelica’s Grades Squadron, so I know more or less everything that is taught in the knight course’s written lessons,” I explained. I had read over the documents we received from Eckhart and Ferdinand countless times, and paid close attention while Damuel, Cornelius, and the others desperately tried to teach Angelica. All things considered, I probably knew the syllabus better than she did.

Hearing my response, Rauffen’s eyes began to sparkle with joy. “Does

that mean you plan to do the knight course alongside your other courses next year?!” he exclaimed. “I look forward to our ditter rematch from the bottom of my heart!”

“No,” I replied without missing a beat and shook my head. “As I said previously, I will not be taking the knight course.”

Rauffen’s eyes opened wide. “But why?!” he leaned toward me and shouted, so worked up that spit flew from his mouth.

“I could never handle the course’s practical lessons,” I explained. The written lessons were straightforward enough, but as was blatantly obvious by this point, I struggled enough just trying to move around.

“Motivation’s all you need!” Rauffen shot back, persisting nonetheless. “You’ll get through it with guts and more guts!” It was such an appropriate response for someone from Dunkelfelger, a duchy that was all about tackling their problems head-on and fighting until they won, but it wasn’t a culture that I wanted anything to do with. I was fundamentally incompatible with it.

“I do not have the necessary motivation,” I replied, “nor do I have ‘guts and more guts.’ But above all else, I do not have the stamina. Simply coming here to give a blessing and perform the healing ritual has brought me to my limit, so please”—I let my body go slack—“let me return to the dormitory.”

Leonore, who was still carrying me, shot Rauffen a glare. “Professor Rauffen, any further questioning will put Lady Rozemyne at great risk, so please stand down,” she said. “I ask that you speak to her another day. Furthermore, although we slew the ternisbefallen, we still do not know how it got here. Such beasts are of course not native to the Royal Academy, so I ask that you investigate its appearance. It is possible that there are more lurking about, so you must warn the other duchies to be on guard.”

Rauffen straightened up and nodded. “Yes, we can discuss Lady Rozemyne attending the knight course later. As you say, the ternisbefallen business comes first.”

“Erm, Professor Rauffen...” I said. “There is not a single thing for us to discuss.”

“You there! Apprentice! Take me to the ternisbefallen.”

“Yes, sir!”

My words were drowned out by the commotion, and the knights who

had been set to return to the beast did so with the professors and Sovereign Knight's Order in tow. After seeing them go, Leonore motioned for us to start toward the dormitory.

Upon our return, we were surrounded by those who had stayed behind and bombarded with questions. Answering them all was a job for my retainers and the apprentice knights, so I allowed Rihyarda to carry me to my room.

"Have you had a potion?" Rihyarda asked. "Ah. In that case, get right to bed. You're burning up all over."

Rihyarda started changing my clothes for me, with assistance from Brunhilde and Lieseleta. I started muttering about reporting the events of the day back to Ehrenfest and the importance of communication, but she shook her head at me with a look of exasperation.

"Lord Wilfried and Lady Charlotte are here and perfectly capable," Rihyarda said. "And since Hartmut was with you, he can write your report for you. You need only focus on your rest, milady. At this rate, you'll miss the tea party in the library you were so looking forward to. And don't forget—the prince is going to be there. If you do not attend after personally inviting him, the repercussions will harm Ehrenfest in its entirety."

Rihyarda was right—now that I had invited Hildebrand, I couldn't risk getting bedridden and missing the tea party. I had no choice but to shut up, crawl into bed, and close my eyes.

The letters were apparently sent to Ehrenfest while I slept. Wilfried's was brimming with excitement over his first time participating in a hunt, Hartmut's extolled the virtues of the Saint of Ehrenfest and her masterful control over the divine instruments, and Charlotte's was crisp and businesslike, covering my discussion with the Sovereignty and a report from Rauffen in addition to everything else.

"Apparently, each report was so different that Aub Ehrenfest assumed they were referring to a series of events rather than just the one and became quite panicked," Philine said. "To summarize the responses we received, we did well in how we reacted to such an abrupt situation. It was all very favorable... except for their order that you return home, Lady Rozemyne."

Philine gave me a sympathetic look as I sat in bed and started reading the responses from Ehrenfest. I couldn't detect any anger from them, nor

was I being chastised, but they did stress that I was to return home as soon as my tea party with royalty was over. Something gave me the impression that they were waiting to give me the scolding of a lifetime... but maybe it was just my imagination.

“It’s that time already...” I muttered. “Please inform Lady Hannelore of Dunkelfelger that I will return the book I am borrowing from her when we meet for our tea party—and that I will be bringing a new book for her.” I had wanted to invite Hannelore to a personal tea party and discuss the book at length before returning it, but there would be no time for that now.

“I believe this order to return is so that Ehrenfest does not socialize with the prince alone while students of all the other duchies are busy,” Philine said. “Perhaps you will be allowed back as soon as the Dedication Ritual is over, and then you will be able to socialize with people other than the prince.”

“All I want is to hole up in the library for the rest of my days...”

Sadly, that dream was going to be a lot more difficult by the time I returned. No longer would my days be blissful and spent buried in books from dawn till dusk. There was only one word for what I felt: despair.

As I slumped my shoulders, Philine consoled me, saying that she would gather stories from many duchies while I was away. Then, she told me what the Sovereignty’s report had covered.

“As Leonore had read, ternisbefallens are native to Werkestock. They do not dwell near the Royal Academy, so it is suspected that someone connected to the duchy brought one here.”

It was supposed to take many years for a ternisbefallen to grow as large as the one we had encountered, and if one were to work backward from the assumption that someone had brought it to the Academy when they were a movable puppy, it would have arrived around the time of the purge, when the Werkestock Dormitory became sealed off.

“However,” Philine continued, “this hypothesis seems unlikely. Had the ternisbefallen truly been on the Academy’s grounds for such a long time, one would expect it to have wreaked havoc near the Werkestock Dormitory. This was not the case.”

A black trail also revealed that the ternisbefallen had come to the Ehrenfest Dormitory from the general direction of the Werkestock Dormitory, and that it had done so in a suspiciously straight line.

“The path that the ternisbefallen took led it past both the Ahrensbach and the Frenbeltag Dormitories, and yet it showed no signs of approaching either of their gathering spots,” Philine said. She then went on to note that the Sovereignty had warned all of the other duchies about the ternisbefallen and told them what its most recognizable traits were in case another appeared. “The official instructions if another is spotted are to contact the Knight’s Order from the dormitory and then buy time for them to arrive. Students have been warned not to hunt it without permission as we did.”

It seemed that crude tactics performed without experience were the root cause of many serious injuries. Rauffen’s approach made sense to me, but I didn’t really understand why they had refrained from teaching everyone how to imbue their weapons with Darkness. Instead, they had forbidden Ehrenfest from using the blessing at all, despite the potential of there being more mana-draining feybeasts about.

“Is there a reason they aren’t just teaching everyone the spell?” I asked. “By doing that, the apprentice knights could fight too.”

“Perhaps because they do not wish to encourage those who would attempt to fight it. By ensuring the students have no means of combating such a beast, the Sovereignty can ensure they have no choice but to move carefully and wait for help should they encounter one.”

I nodded my understanding. That certainly was one way to keep the students under control. No matter how doubtful or dissatisfied one was, they had to do as the Sovereignty ordered.

“I see... And how is Roderick?” I asked. “Did he retrieve his ingredients?”

“Roderick? He is currently striving to make his name-swearing feystone, although he was quite glum to learn just how much mana is required to create one. He’ll need to make a few rejuvenation potions first,” she replied, giggling. His innocuous trip to gather the feystone had certainly escalated into something massive, but overall, it had ended without issue.

I sighed, relieved that things were back to normal... including the fact that I was bedridden.

A Tea Party of Bookworms

“Good morning, milady. How are you feeling today?” Rihyarda asked.

Better than I’ve ever been! Eheheheh.

After chugging the ultra-nasty potion and staying in bed so obediently that even Rihyarda was surprised, my fever had completely vanished. It was a good thing too, since my health was more important than anything for making this bookworm tea party a success. I got out of my bed and allowed Brunhilde to dress me.

“I am glad to see that you have recovered,” Brunhilde said with a smile as she started doing my hair. “We shall go with two hairpins today—I wish to use flower ornaments that match the ones added to Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes.”

Meanwhile, Lieseleta was preparing my clothes with a quiet smile. These, too, seemed to match what Schwartz and Weiss were now wearing. It appeared that she had added embroidery along the hem of my skirt which was similar to that on the shumils’ clothes—not the magic circle embroidery, of course, but rather the floral embroidery along the hems of their skirt and pants. Her dedication was clear to see.

Of course, I don’t really care how much our outfits match, so long as we’re all wearing our Library Committee armbands.

My armband was fastened in place once again. I would give one to Hannelore as well, and then we would all be matching.

“Lady Rozemyne, please raise your chin so that I may put on your scarf,” Lieseleta said. “I shall tie it into a bow for you.” From a distance, she seemed fairly composed, but she was speaking faster than usual, and one could tell when she came nearer that her cheeks were flushed red with excitement.

“Lieseleta, I see that you embroidered my clothes as well as those of Schwartz and Weiss,” I said. “That must have been quite the endeavor.”

“My greatest fear was that you might not approve,” she replied. “The embroidery itself was trivial.” But no matter how I looked at it, “trivial”

was a gross understatement; I certainly wouldn't want to attempt what she had accomplished myself.

Lieseleta's love for shumils sure has been explosive.

As I examined the embroidered skirt, Brunhilde went through the final checks for today's tea party. "We are going to be bringing two kinds of sweets with us: pound cake, with honey and apfelsige varieties to choose from, and cookies, with tea and walnut varieties." She had also asked the kitchen for jam, cream, and rumtopf as condiments.

"As previously promised, Rosina will be playing music of your composition," Brunhilde continued. "This way, Dunkelfelger's musician may learn them as well."

"Have we confirmed that Lady Hannelore is bringing her musician?" I asked.

"Of course."

Because I was going to be leaving the Royal Academy sooner than anticipated, we had made several last-minute requests of Hannelore—including that we exchange books and that she receive my songs during our tea party rather than at some later date. She had agreed to them all without any problems.

"Rihyarda, do we have the book to return to Dunkelfelger and the new book to give her?" I asked. "Our plan is to lend her *Royal Academy Love Stories*."

"They are ready, milady."

"Take care not to forget the manuscript of the book we borrowed from them rewritten in modern vernacular; I will need to consult Lady Hannelore on whether I may print it. Oh, and her committee armband too..."

"All prepared," Rihyarda said with a chuckle. "We also intend to let Prince Hildebrand borrow our collection of knight stories, correct?"

I had consulted Ehrenfest over whether I could lend an Ehrenfest book to Hildebrand, and their response had been that I could choose anything except the picture-book bibles, since they were too relevant to our classwork. In fact, they had even ordered me to pay attention to the prince—to avoid speaking exclusively to my bookworm friend for the entire duration of our tea party. They actually wanted me to speak with Hildebrand, even if that meant recommending him a book.

Ferdinand was right. I need to do my best to convert the prince into a

bookworm who loves reading too!

Our tea party was scheduled for third bell, so at second-and-a-half bell, when morning classes began, it was time for us to go. I headed for the library with my luggage-burdened retainers.

“Milady’s here.”

“Tea party today.”

As per usual, the two shumils were there to greet me.

“Please use the table in my office. My attendants are getting everything ready as we speak,” Solange said, leading the way for us. We were having today’s tea party in her office, and additional chairs were already being brought in.

“Let us hurry and complete our own preparations,” Rihyarda said. “There is not much time before third bell.”

And so, my attendants got right to work. We had to be more disciplined this year, since we knew there was going to be royalty in attendance. The apprentice scholars secured space to take notes, while Rosina began preparing her instrument and practicing before the guests arrived.

Solange left us to our preparations and opened the door, such that we could now see the rest of the office and the reading room from where we were seated. In contrast to last year, however, there were no students here today.

“It certainly is rare for there to be no students at all...” I remarked.

“There was a report of a ternisbefallen being encountered the other day, so most dormitories are standing guard in shifts to ensure their gathering spots are safe,” Solange replied. Since only the Sovereign knights could deal with such beasts, detecting them as early as possible was key. “Are the students of your duchy not doing the same?”

“We were told that the ternisbefallen was defeated and that there were no signs of any others nearby. We have not made a particular effort to protect our gathering spot, and those among our students who need to gather are doing so. If, by chance, another ternisbefallen appears, we will discover it then.”

The public story was that the Sovereign knights had defeated the ternisbefallen, since if news spread that we from Ehrenfest had slain it on our own, other duchies would most likely get fired up and try to do the same themselves. It was definitely for the best, considering that the

professors were refusing to teach the spell for making black weapons.

"When unusual feybeasts appear on the Academy's grounds, most apprentice knights remain on guard even when the threat is said to have passed," Solange said with a refined giggle. "I see Ehrenfest has a far calmer demeanor."

Behind us, Cornelius muttered, "We have our hands full enough trying to keep Rozemyne under control." Solange didn't appear to have heard him, but that didn't make it any more excusable.

Oh, come on! I haven't done any *rampaging lately! Well... I haven't done much, at least!*

Before I could turn around and pout at Cornelius, Solange smiled at me and continued. "I am especially pleased that Prince Hildebrand has offered his assistance," she said. "Keeping Schwartz and Weiss supplied with mana is not something that a single girl should need to handle alone. Also, Lady Hannelore is an archduke candidate from Dunkelfelger, is she not? Given the incident last year, I had worried that problems might arise, even if she has no ill intent herself."

I noticed that Solange's blue eyes were tinged with sympathy. She had feared that Dunkelfelger would make some unreasonable demands, no matter how Hannelore felt about the matter... but with Hildebrand now in the picture, she could finally rest easy.

"Perhaps if the Sovereignty learns of the state of the library through Prince Hildebrand, they will send archnobles of their own to serve as librarians. Manpower is scarce all over, but they may prioritize sending support to locations that have earned the favor of royalty," Solange continued. Even with Schwartz and Weiss providing their assistance, managing the library was a difficult task for a single mednoble like her.

"If there is anything I can do to help, you need only say so." I tapped my armband demonstratively. "I am a member of the Library Committee, after all."

Solange gave a small, happy smile. "Oh, you are already helping more than enough," she said. It seemed that, although I wanted to do more traditional committee work, she was fine with me just supplying Schwartz and Weiss with mana.

Rihyarda and the others finished their preparations while Solange and I talked, and soon enough, third bell started to ring. Rosina stopped

practicing, and a quiet calm returned to the office just as Hannelore and her retainers arrived. I welcomed her, a little taken aback that she had arrived almost immediately after the bell chimed.

"Welcome, Lady Hannelore."

"I thank you ever so much for inviting me, Lady Rozemyne, Professor Solange. I have been very much looking forward to this tea party," Hannelore said with a smile as we exchanged greetings. "Lady Rozemyne, I thank you ever so much for striving to keep your promise despite being busy with your upcoming return."

"I apologize for any shock that Prince Hildebrand's abrupt participation might have brought you," I replied. Last year, when I saw Anastasius at the tea party with the music professors, I was so shocked that it took me a moment to regain my ability to speak. Hannelore had no doubt been just as shocked when she learned that royalty was going to be attending today, and she was probably battling with all kinds of anxious feelings.

Or so I thought.

Hannelore smiled and elegantly shook her head. "It did catch me off guard, but you are not to blame, Lady Rozemyne. Requests from royalty simply cannot be refused. It was just a small, small case of unfortunate timing."

Golly... Hannelore sure is kind. I called royalty over without her permission and she doesn't mind at all.

As I stood there, allowing Hannelore's radiant smile to heal my soul, she instructed the musicians she had brought to prepare seats next to Rosina. She could see that Hartmut and Philine were seated and ready to take notes, so she directed her scholars to join them, making her own preparations in short order.

Well, she may be quiet and fluffy, but there's no mistaking that she's an archduke candidate from a greater duchy.

It was then that I noticed she was occasionally glancing toward the wide-open doors to the reading room, where Schwartz and Weiss could be seen. I waited for her to finish giving her instructions and then said, "Lady Hannelore, shall we register you as a member of the Library Committee before the tea party? That will allow you to touch Schwartz and Weiss."

Hannelore blushed, as if embarrassed that I had seen through her, and then nodded. "Yes, please," she said quietly.

“Schwartz, Weiss,” I called to the two shumils in the reading room, “register my friend as an assistant.”

“Milady’s friend.”

“Register.”

Schwartz and Weiss walked over, their heads characteristically swaying from side to side. Hannelore’s eyes sparkled when she saw them closer, and she said with a smile, “Their clothes match yours, Lady Rozemyne.” I mentioned that Lieseleta had put her all into the embroidery, and by the time I was done, the registration was complete.

“Lady Hannelore, now you need only put on this Library Committee armband and touch the shumils’ feystones,” I explained as I passed an armband to one of her attendants, who helped Hannelore to fasten it around her arm. It was perfect. She made a perfect Library Committee member. “And now you are matching as well,” I said, tapping my own armband.

Schwartz mimicked me, tapping their armband as well. “Hannelore matching.”

“Oh my!” Hannelore exclaimed. She placed a hand over her mouth and giggled with amusement. “How cute.”

Our surrounding attendants were looking at Schwartz with warm eyes. Meanwhile, Hannelore reached out to touch the shumils, since she was now able to without consequence. She stroked their foreheads with her eyes closed, basking in delight.

“So am I now a... Library Committee member?” Hannelore mused aloud. “I truly look forward to working with you, Schwartz, Weiss.”

“One of us, Hannelore,” the shumils replied. Seeing them standing on either side of the now-beaming Hannelore made them look like one big family, which was indescribably heartwarming.

Aah. I’m so glad that I invited Lady Hannelore to join our committee.

“Lady Rozemyne, what do Library Committee members do?” Hannelore asked. “I know of no duties except supplying Schwartz and Weiss with mana.”

“That is our most important duty. This can wait until you are done with your classes, Lady Hannelore, but please visit the library while I am absent and stroke their feystones.”

“So it is our job to dote upon Schwartz and Weiss?” Hannelore said, her eyes widening as she looked between Solange and me.

Solange nodded with a smile. “One requires both Light and Darkness affinities to activate Schwartz and Weiss. I cannot do this myself, so what I appreciate most is your assistance doting on them and providing them with your mana. The shumils will certainly appreciate visitors while their master Lady Rozemyne is absent, so please feel welcome to visit.”

“Understood,” Hannelore replied, returning a smile that was brimming with excitement.

It was at this point that Hildebrand arrived. His attendants handed some sweets that they had brought with them to Brunhilde, who was standing in front of everyone, while Hildebrand trotted over to where we were doting on Schwartz and Weiss.

“I have much looked forward to this blessed day. Thank you ever so much for inviting me,” the prince said, albeit rather stiffly, as though he were simply reciting lines he had been taught to say. He looked between Schwartz, Weiss, and me several times, then smiled brightly. “I see you are all wearing matching clothes today!”

“One of my attendants embroidered them to be similar,” I replied, pinching my skirt up a little to show off the embroidery. “Wonderful, isn’t it?”

Hildebrand broke into a wide smile. “Yes, it’s very cute. Oh? And I see Hannelore is wearing the same armband.”

“Indeed. It is the armband of the Library Committee.”

Hildebrand seemed to compare Hannelore’s arm to his own for a moment and then gazed down at the floor. He looked so sad that I wanted to offer him my own armband, but I swallowed the urge; it would be exceedingly rude for me to give him a possession of my own without his asking for it. At the very least, it would need to be a new one.

“If you would not find it rude of me, Prince Hildebrand, I could request to have an identical armband made for you,” I noted. “What do you say?”

“You could do that?” the prince replied.

“Indeed. Unfortunately, I cannot offer you the one I am using myself. And, erm... it would not be rude of me to provide you with a new one, would it?”

I recalled my lectures from Brunhilde about not making decisions without first consulting my attendants, so this time, I turned my attention to those accompanying Hildebrand. The prince noticed my gaze and turned,

gazing up at his retainers with hopeful eyes.

“If the prince wishes...” one finally said.

“I do.”

“Then I will have one prepared,” I said. “My personal seamstress is quite talented; I believe it will be ready by the time I return to the Royal Academy. Now, shall we begin the tea party?”

Once everyone had been guided to their seats, I signaled Rosina with a glance. She gave a brisk nod in response and then started to play the harspiel. I could tell that Dunkelfelger’s musicians were staring at her hands, focusing their minds on every note.

Our attendants began pouring tea while I described the sweets we had brought with us. “Today, I prepared sweets that are currently popular in Ehrenfest,” I said. “This is pound cake, of which we have brought two flavors: honey and apfelsige. You may eat them with jam and cream of your choosing. These over here are called cookies. Again, we have two flavors: tea and walnut.”

Once my explanation was complete, I took demonstrative bites of the sweets to indicate the lack of poison.

Hildebrand was a child who had only recently been baptized, so I had prepared pound cake on the sweeter side for him. Hannelore had eaten these sweets during our tea party last year and swiftly ordered her attendant to pile her plate with apfelsige pound cake and jam. Meanwhile, Solange had her attendant fetch her some honey pound cake and rumtopf.

Rihyarda started putting apfelsige pound cake and cream on my plate, moving carefully so that Hildebrand’s attendant could observe and emulate the process. That, as well as the demonstrations from Hannelore’s and Solange’s attendants, seemed to have been enough; Hildebrand’s attendant successfully plated some honey pound cake and jam, as per the prince’s request.

Once everyone had enjoyed their tea and tasted the sweets, we could finally enter a real discussion. Of course, the first item on the agenda was committee work. “I can now relax during my absence, knowing that the both of you will be assisting me as fellow Library Committee members,” I said.

“Prince Hildebrand is receiving not only an armband, but also a position in the Library Committee?” Hannelore asked, her red eyes widening in

surprise. “Erm... Will that be possible?” It seemed that she had interpreted my earlier offer of an armband as a kind gesture and nothing more; she hadn’t realized that the prince was already registered as a committee member. She seemed worried about whether he could carry out the accompanying duties while needing to hide away in his room to minimize contact with students.

“As you know, I can’t keep coming to the library for much longer,” the prince said. “It won’t be long before too many students start coming here, but let’s work together until then, Hannelore.”

“I would be honored to work alongside you, Prince Hildebrand,” Hannelore replied. “I presume we will only have a few opportunities to meet in the library—unlike Lady Rozemyne, who came first-in-class last year, I am not so quick to finish my lessons—but I am glad to be here with you nonetheless.”

Solange listened to their conversation with a smile, no doubt relieved that she wouldn’t need to worry so much about the shumils’ mana supply. “I am truly glad that the both of you joined the Library Committee,” she said. “This library quickly falls apart without Schwartz and Weiss.”

“In what way?” Hildebrand asked, a serious expression on his face.

Solange gave an even broader smile. “The books of this library all belong to royalty, so we ask that students return them by their due dates. However, when Schwartz and Weiss are not functioning, many are not returned, and many students remove books without going through the required procedures.”

“Oh my. So they do not return the books despite the fact they belong to royalty?” Hannelore asked, blinking several times as though the very idea was foreign to her.

“The archnobles of the bottom-ranking duchies know that Professor Solange cannot approach them too harshly no matter what they do,” I explained. “Their behavior is highly improper as a result.”

“Something must be done about that,” Hildebrand declared, exuding a masculine sense of righteousness. “They’re making a mockery of the royal family.”

I clapped my hands together in realization. “What if Prince Hildebrand were to send the reminder ordonnanzes this year? The students will surely be tripping over themselves to return their books if a member of royalty

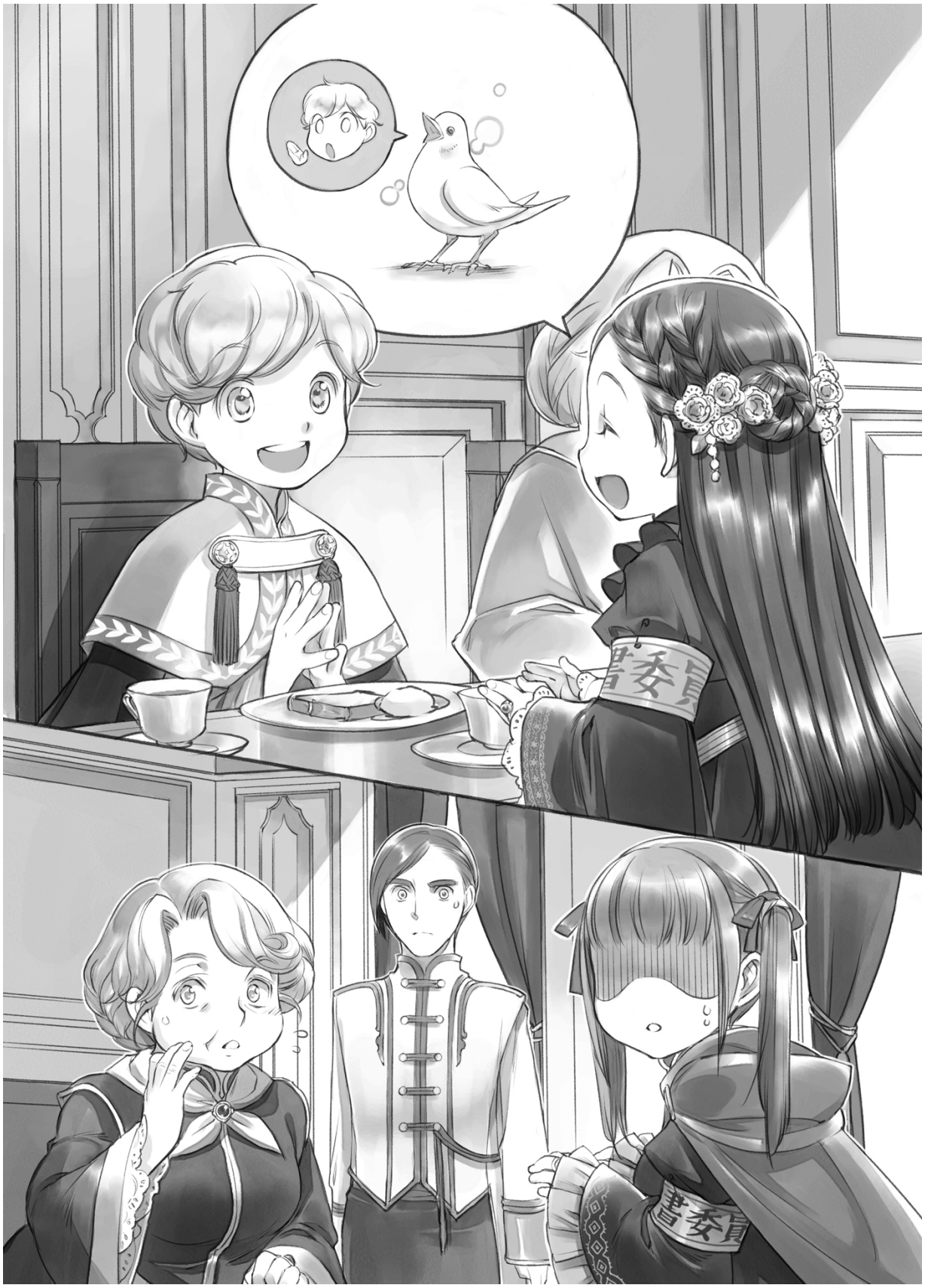
personally orders it.”

“Ah...?”

As everyone stared at me in astonishment, Hildebrand alone clapped in response. “That’s an amazing idea!” he said, his purple eyes sparkling. “That way, I can be like a proper royal, even when I can’t stay in the library for long.”

“Prince Hildebrand has made his support clear. What do you think, Professor Solange?” I asked excitedly, thinking this would work even better than having Ferdinand send the messages.

Solange placed a hand on her cheek and gave a troubled smile. “I imagine it would prove very effective, but... Would it really be acceptable for Prince Hildebrand to take such public action?”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Oh, right... I've seen him in the library so many times that I forgot he's supposed to be keeping out of the public eye.

"I will ask Father whether this can be considered a royal duty," Hildebrand said. It seemed that he *could* do things that were expected of the royal family, although I doubted that prompting students to return books would count. Still, he was excited to have found something to do, so I decided to keep quiet about it.

Having a prince send out these messages would have a huge impact, and I can't bring myself to dash his hopes, so... Yeah.

"Lady Rozemyne, would you like more tea?" Brunhilde asked. She elegantly poured me another cup and added to my plate a few cookies... one of which she flipped upside down in front of me.

She's telling me to "change the subject at once." I see. Seems like I really shouldn't have said that.

Although I wasn't entirely sure what the issue was, I decided to bring our current discussion to a natural conclusion. "I will entrust this prompting to you if you are granted permission, Prince Hildebrand. There is no pressure, however—we may simply repeat what we did last year if you are not."

Now I just needed to think of another topic appropriate to our tea party. I wanted something that would interest Hildebrand as well, although that was easier said than done. He wasn't officially attending the Royal Academy yet, so talking about classes or people whom only Hannelore and I knew would most likely make him feel excluded. No matter how much I racked my brain, I couldn't think of anything that was appropriate to us all.

What would a prince love to talk about...?

Dealing with Anastasius had been easy, since he had only ever wanted to talk about Eglantine. Pretty much nobody knew what Hildebrand cared about, though. He had just been baptized and generally spent his time hidden away in his room, so I couldn't figure out what to say.

Okay. Something that everyone here would enjoy talking about, then... The only shared thing between us is the Royal Academy. Hm... Oh!

"I have been meaning to ask this, Professor Solange, but do you know of the Royal Academy's twenty mysteries?" I asked.

"I know of many strange tales passed down in the Royal Academy," Solange replied, leaping at this new topic of conversation. "I did not think

there were twenty, however."

"I, too, am familiar with them," Hannelore added, similarly eager for us to move on. "That said, I did not think there were twenty either."

This seemed to catch the prince's attention; he leaned closer, his bright purple eyes sparkling. "The twenty mysteries of the Royal Academy? What are those?"

"Tall tales woven by bored students to amuse themselves," I explained. "They morph over time and fuse with other, similar stories, such that their origins are as mysterious as their veracity. A scholar whom I know taught me the ones he remembered from when our mothers and fathers were in the Royal Academy."

"Tell me some of them, Rozemyne."

My choice of subject was evidently a success; everyone was looking at me curiously. Unfortunately for Hildebrand, there wasn't much more I could say. I intended to let Solange and Hannelore take the wheel, such that I didn't overstep any boundaries by mistake... although there were a few stories I could touch upon.

"Well, I know of a statue of the gods that dances on the night of the graduation ceremony," I said. "I also know of a gazebo where the Goddess of Time plays pranks and a gewinnen set that plays ditter. There is also the forbidden archive. I do not know the details of any of these, but perhaps Professor Solange and Lady Hannelore do? I would love to hear more about them as well."

Hildebrand gazed up at his attendant. "Do you know anything about them, Arthur?"

Arthur, who looked to be about twenty years old, gave a troubled smile and rested a hand on the prince's shoulder. "I believe we should let Professor Solange speak." Attendants were not allowed to lead discussions at tea parties; they needed only to stand knowingly in the background. Hildebrand inhaled sharply, having asked purely out of habit.

Solange watched the prince's youthful inexperience with a warm expression. "Well, where should I begin...?" she said. "Hm... Perhaps the shrine of the two supreme gods. There are shrines to the gods throughout the Royal Academy, but there was once a mischievous student who pulled pranks at this shrine in particular. He received only warnings for his actions, since he was not affecting students or professors directly, and so he

continued to make them more and more elaborate. One day, however, an especially bright beam of light fell upon him, and he vanished. The student was never seen again."

"Oh? But where did he go, then?" Hildebrand asked. He and Hannelore looked particularly shaken, but Solange merely smiled and shook her head.

"Unfortunately, nobody knows. I can say only that the gods see all, even when you think you are acting out of their sight. If you three aren't good boys and girls, then the shrine to the supreme gods at the Farthest Hall will take you away to the distant heights."

This sounds like a moral you'd tell small children, but the fact that it sounds like it could actually happen makes it kind of scary.

"Ah yes, and there was a story I recognized among those Lady Rozemyne mentioned," Solange continued. "There certainly is a gazebo where the Goddess of Time plays her tricks. It may be some time before this applies to the three of you, but you will want to visit the gazebo with the boy or girl you are romantically interested in. It exists such that archduke candidates can speak in privacy, since retainers are not allowed under it. Perhaps the day will come when you visit the gazebo for yourselves..." She giggled and gave us all teasing looks.

The gazebo didn't have any walls, which meant the retainers waiting outside could still see what their lords and ladies were doing. If the two romantics brought sound-blocking tools, however, they could speak to one another as they liked. Apparently, the gazebo had ended up being associated with the Goddess of Time because time flew when you were alone with the one you loved; those inside had no eyes for anything but each other.

"However, you must not accept invitations to this gazebo lightly. Onlookers will view you and your companion as being romantically involved," Solange explained. It reminded me of *Royal Academy Love Stories*.

Aah. So this is the gazebo that Sylvester tried so hard to invite Florencia to. I was never too sure why he was so obsessed with it, but now I see it's a place where lovers go. When she had said, "I will accompany you elsewhere, but not there," I had mostly wondered why he didn't just take her up on the offer.

I hadn't really understood why Sylvester had pleaded to the gods with unending lines of poetry following Florencia's rejection, but now it all

made sense. And as I was nodding to myself, Hannelore went on to talk about another mystery.

“I am familiar with the gewinnen set that plays ditter,” she said. “A gewinnen set the size of a baptized child will begin a game in the middle of the night. I am told many have seen it with their own eyes, but I do not know the details.”

For some reason, whenever I hear the word “ditter” now, I immediately think of Dunkelfelger. It’s all Professor Rauffen’s fault.

I thanked Hannelore for her contribution and then looked to Solange. “Professor Solange, do you know anything about the forbidden archive?”

“If you’re referring to any book storage room that cannot be opened, then I know of at least three,” she replied.

“WHAAAT?! Three?!” I exclaimed, surprised not only by her answer, but also in part by how smoothly she had delivered it.

Solange looked at Hildebrand and his retainers, then carefully nodded. “There were previously three librarians who worked here. Each had a key, and there is an archive that can be opened only when all three are used at once. For security purposes, the location of each key was kept secret to all except the respective librarian. Now that they are gone, these locations are known to none, and there are three archives that can no longer be entered. This is not a problem at the moment, as they contain ancient documents that are seldom used. I imagine the keys are in the late librarians’ bedrooms, so I am awaiting the day when new archnoble librarians are assigned to us and the archives might be reopened.”

The temple had a bible that required a key to open and could only be used by those with the High Bishop’s express permission. The three keys that Solange had mentioned were presumably of a similar design. Just thinking about there being three forbidden archives filled me with excitement; Hildebrand and his retainers could serve as the required Sovereign archnobles, so perhaps the archives would reopen sometime soon.

But wait... Is the archive that requires three keys to access the same as the one Justus mentioned that only royalty can enter?

“Do you know of a forbidden archive that can be entered only by royalty?” I asked.

“I do not know of any such archive,” Solange replied. “Do you know

where it might be?”

I was very disappointed to learn she couldn’t provide any more information, but Hildebrand appeared to be surprised. “If only royalty can enter, that means I can go inside,” he said.

“It’s only a rumor,” I noted, “so I cannot say whether it truly exists. Especially in a generation such as ours when few remember the old tales.”

“I will ask Mother and Father. They may know some other interesting stories,” Hildebrand replied with an amused smile.

I instinctively leaned forward at the prospect of receiving stories from royalty. “Prince Hildebrand, I would love to hear any interesting stories you might have.” By noting them down and asking Justus for more details back in Ehrenfest, it was possible that I could make a book on the Royal Academy’s twenty mysteries—which would presumably go in the boys’ section alongside the knight stories.

Oh, right. Books. I need to return mine.

It was better to do that now than to cause a fuss when it was time for the tea party to end. I glanced to the corner of the table where Hartmut and Philine were recording the conversation. When our eyes met, Hartmut stood up and reached for the book. I nodded.

“Lady Hannelore, as mentioned, I will soon be returning to Ehrenfest. May I return the book that I borrowed from you now, before it is time for me to leave?”

“Certainly. I will return your book as well.” Hannelore turned to her apprentice scholars, who then carried out the exchange with mine. She watched for a moment as both parties examined their books, then turned back to me and smiled. “Lady Rozemyne, the book you lent me was very easy to read thanks to it being written in modern vernacular. I had quite a good time with it. In fact, I believe that I may even love Ehrenfest books.”

Oh my... I’m so overjoyed, I can’t even speak. The joy is simply too much.

The book that Hannelore had read existed only because of the paper that Lutz and the others had made, the printing presses from Johann and his colleagues, and all the hard work of those in the Rozemyne Workshop. I was pleased beyond words that a noble outside of Ehrenfest could enjoy the fruit of our labor as well, and the very thought that I had a friend who loved books and wanted to read them made me want to pray to the gods in

appreciation.

A blessing's about to come out! Keep it together, me!

As I trembled with emotion, Rihyarda stealthily handed me an empty feystone. I gripped it and started pouring in my mana with a noticeable sigh of relief.

Hannelore blinked several times. "Is something the matter, Lady Rozemyne?"

"Not at all. I was just recalling how much effort went into the creation of that book, and your words are confirmation that it was indeed worth it. I have always wanted a friend to read and discuss books with, as we do now."

"Surely you exaggerate," Hannelore said, regarding me with a modest smile.

"I will lend you *Royal Academy Love Stories* next," I said. "It is a collection based on real events that happened during our mothers' generations. I do not know who stars in which stories, but Professor Hirschur seemed to recognize quite a few of them."

Philine brought the book over and handed it to Hannelore's apprentice scholar, who flipped through the pages before passing it to Hannelore.

"Are there Dunkelfelger stories within?" Hannelore asked.

"There are several stories featuring apprentice knights, some of which may be from Dunkelfelger," I replied. There were, for example, tales about female apprentice knights promising their hands to men who could win ditter games for them. In some cases the man won, while in others he lost. I personally thought that the stories ending in the former were a lot more likely to be from Dunkelfelger than those ending in the latter, considering the culture there.

"I cannot wait."

"If you know of any Dunkelfelger romances, Lady Hannelore, do tell. They may make for a good book. If your apprentice scholars were to write manuscripts, I would purchase them with glee."

My suggestion was met with sparkling eyes—not from Hannelore, but from her retainers. I wanted them to gather as many stories as they could, so hopefully they would put their backs into it.

"Lady Rozemyne, please allow me to read your duchy's books as well," Solange said. "My line of work has given me quite a universal admiration of new books."

“I understand exactly how you feel,” I replied. “Hartmut.”

Hartmut handed the book of romance-focused knight stories he had just taken from Hannelore to Solange. She stroked its cover with a curious look and then carefully opened it.

“Ehrenfest books are light, convenient to hold, and very easy to read. They even contain the most wonderful illustrations,” Hannelore remarked, her cheeks flushing red with enthusiasm as she shilled the heck out of our books to Solange.

Solange looked up and gave Hannelore a smile. “Indeed, Lady Hannelore. And the fact that Ehrenfest books made a fine young lady such as yourself into a booklover shows me just how wonderful they must be.”

Their conversation filled me with joy—so much so that I was even a little glad to be returning home. I wanted to get back to Ehrenfest right away to praise my Gutenbergs.

I’m gonna tell them that a greater duchy’s archduke candidate loved their work! Lutz will definitely be pleased to hear that. Benno might even jump for joy at how rich he’s going to get. Everyone in the orphanage needs rewards too.

There wasn’t much I could do right now—the food prepared for winter was generally simple and inexpensive due to how much was needed—but I resolved to provide the orphanage with more expensive food come spring.

As I made that decision, I noticed that Hildebrand was looking between Solange and Hannelore. He timidly opened his mouth and said, “Rozemyne, I would like to read an Ehrenfest book too.”

“So it shall be done, Prince Hildebrand!”

I gave a silent cheer on the inside. Given my slipup at the start, I wouldn’t have been able to recommend a book without Hildebrand explicitly requesting it. I turned to Hartmut, who gave a copy of the knight stories to the prince’s attendant, Arthur.

“The book I lent to Lady Hannelore was centered around romantic knight stories, but I believe this one focused on battles will be more to your liking. I made it hoping that it could be enjoyed by children just learning to read, so I imagine that adults will consider it light reading at most.”

Arthur nodded curtly while looking through the pages and then handed the book to Hildebrand. “As Lady Rozemyne suggests, I believe this book is of an ideal difficulty for you, Prince Hildebrand.” It was hard enough that

he wouldn’t be able to breeze through it, but not so hard that he would toss it aside in frustration.

The prince nodded and said that he would do his best to read the book. I could tell from his expression that he was just pleased to have received a book like Hannelore and Solange.

“Now then—I will lend a book to you as well, Lady Rozemyne,” Hannelore said, presumably having been waiting for me to finish distributing mine. “Clarissa.” She looked over at one of her apprentice scholars, who handed a thick Dunkelfelger book to Hartmut.

“I thank you ever so much. Now I have something to look forward to at home,” I said. With a new book in hand, the pain of having to leave the Royal Academy library was significantly reduced. Hannelore was my savior.

“Um... How is it, Lady Rozemyne?” Hannelore asked. “I know that Dunkelfelger books are, erm, thick and hard to read, with all of the old language they use...” She seemed worried that I wouldn’t be able to read the book she was giving me, considering how simply Ehrenfest books were written, but I shook my head.

“Because of the bible, I am already used to ancient turns of phrase,” I said. “If anything, I am in awe of Dunkelfelger’s long and rich history. I enjoyed the last book quite a bit.”

“So you did enjoy it, then,” Hannelore replied, her expression betraying her relief. And with that, I had an important request to make.

“Excuse me, Lady Hannelore—there is something I must ask. I rewrote your duchy’s history book in modern vernacular, but could I ask you to check it for errors?” I asked, holding out the thick manuscript while Hannelore and Clarissa blinked at me in surprise. Clarissa accepted it, then balked while flipping through its pages.

“There are quite a lot of pages,” Clarissa said. “I do not believe we could check the entire thing today.”

“Of course. I am not asking that the manuscript be checked right now; rather, I was hoping that you might borrow it.”

“Then it shall be done later,” Hannelore said, accepting my request without protest.

“Furthermore, since I have put so much time into this endeavor, I was hoping to make a book based on the manuscript. May I have your

permission to do this?”

“You would produce a book on Dunkelfelger history in Ehrenfest?” Hannelore asked, her confusion clear on her face as she looked at her attendant. I thought it was great fun to read a book on the history of another duchy, but perhaps I was an exception. Or maybe it was just for reference—the kind of material that was never meant to be taken outside of a library.

“This is somewhat beyond me to settle on my own...” Hannelore eventually replied. “Erm, may I take the manuscript home with me and consult the aub?”

“You certainly may.”

I pray that Aub Dunkelfelger allows it...

“In that case, I shall lend you documents of my own, Lady Rozemyne. Perhaps it will allow you to feel more like a librarian,” Solange said as she handed me some reports. They were apparently very important, and Solange had relied on them to carry out her work when the archnoble librarians disappeared so suddenly. “Some of these cover magic tools that previously operated in the library. Perhaps they will assist you in making your own.”

These documents weren’t to be put on shelves for students to borrow—they were reports that the previous librarians had written as part of their work. Perhaps they would be the most detailed sources on library magic tools out there.

“I love you, Professor Solange.”

“Oh my. Ohoho...”

Hartmut took the documents from the laughing Solange and set them atop the book we had just received from Dunkelfelger. I followed the rising stack with my eyes. I wanted to start tearing through it right away, but I knew that I would end up completely distracted for the rest of the tea party. My retainers appeared to know this too; Cornelius moved ever so subtly so that he blocked my view of the documents.

“Arthur, I would like to lend Rozemyne something as well,” Hildebrand said, turning to his attendant. “Do we have any good books?” I could only assume that royalty were used to receiving offerings without ever giving anything back, but he was so sincere that he immediately thought about lending me a book in return.

Wowee! He sure is a good prince. I can’t believe I’ll get to read a

Sovereign book!

As I sat there, moved that I would be able to read books from a new territory, Arthur lowered his eyes in thought. “It would be possible to prepare a book for next time,” he said; then he glanced over at me. “But I imagine she would better appreciate being invited to the palace library, no?”

I was so overwhelmed with glee that I fainted on the spot.

Going Home

The next thing I knew, I was lying in my bed. I had fallen asleep without realizing, apparently. I sat up, wondering why I couldn't remember the previous night, and reached for the bell sitting beside me. No sooner had I rung it than Rihyarda pushed through the curtains around my bed with an anxious expression.

"How are you feeling, milady?"

"I had the most wonderful dream," I replied. "I was invited to *the* palace library."

"That was not a dream... but we will need to wait and see whether the king grants his permission. I am just glad to see you well," Rihyarda said, her worry swiftly turning to exasperation. At that moment, my memories suddenly came flooding back to me—I had collapsed midway through the tea party after failing to control my mana due to overflowing elation.

Nooo! This is the second time I've collapsed at a tea party I was hosting—the second time I've passed out in front of royalty!

The blood drained from my face. This wasn't good. In fact, it was pretty bad. "Rihyarda, erm... The tea party? How did the tea party go?" I asked, looking up at her fearfully.

"Naturally, it was suspended. We could not continue in that state," she replied. It seemed that our comfy bookworm tea party had turned into a suspense-laden horror story when I abruptly passed out. "The prince's retainers fell into a bit of a panic when you noisily collapsed onto the floor the moment they suggested inviting you to the palace library—and Sovereign archnobles are supposed to be better at containing their feelings than anyone, milady."

Arthur, the evident cause of my collapse, had spluttered, "Wha?!" and stood frozen in place with his mouth opened wide. It wasn't exactly normal for someone to collapse out of sheer excitement at the mere suggestion of receiving permission for something.

Oof. Sorry, Arthur.

Hildebrand had seen my corpse-like state and tearfully asked the frozen Arthur, “What happened to Rozemyne?” His retainers had tried to calm him down, but their cracking voices had given away how anxious they were themselves.

I’m sorry, everyone. I really am. I didn’t mean to traumatize you all.

“You needed feystones from the moment the discussion turned to books,” Rihyarda said. “It’s understandable that nothing could contain your excitement when it came to an invitation to the palace library. However, you’ve once again collapsed in front of royalty, milady. Lady Hannelore got teary-eyed as well, no doubt remembering last year.”

Solange had apparently been just as terrified.

“What happened next?” I asked.

Rihyarda explained that she had sent an ordonnanz to Wilfried and Charlotte, requesting their help. Upon their arrival, they had consoled the prince’s group, explained the circumstances, and settled what issues they could. Meanwhile, Rihyarda had carried me out with my guard knights while my attendants and scholars cleaned things up.

“You will need to thank them both later, milady.”

“I know...”

I sure am a nuisance, aren’t I...?

As I hung my head, I realized there was one important question that I hadn’t yet asked. I nervously looked up at Rihyarda. “Erm... When was the tea party, exactly? Yesterday or just a moment ago?”

“Two days ago. We have received countless get-well presents and worried ordonnanzes from Prince Hildebrand, Lady Hannelore, and Professor Solange.”

I cradled my aching head, and that was when I heard voices from the other side of the curtains confirming that I was awake. It seemed that my female retainers had started to gather in my room after being informed that I was conscious again.

“If your mana has calmed and you feel well again, milady, then let us go eat. Lady Charlotte will soon be returning for lunch. Please do show her how much you have recovered,” Rihyarda said.

It was only then that I realized I had been dumping mana into feystones while I slept, which explained why I had woken up feeling so refreshed. I climbed out of bed, and when I passed through the surrounding curtains, my

retainers all gave a collective look of relief.

“I’m sorry to have worried you all,” I said.

“There is nothing for you to apologize for, Lady Rozemyne,” Brunhilde replied. “To think I would allow you to collapse during a tea party with royalty... I am a failure of an attendant.”

Brunhilde promptly started washing my face and then dressed me, her lips pursed in frustration all the while... but what she had said wasn’t true in the slightest. My attendants had worked so hard to ensure that my tea party was a success, thinking up ways to communicate with me through how they served cookies and tea and memorizing the best times to hand me feystones. There was no way they were failures.

“You are not the failure here, Brunhilde; I am, for having fallen unconscious in the presence of royalty on a second occasion,” I said, slumping my shoulders. But Leonore quietly shook her head.

“This incident can hardly be described as your fault, Lady Rozemyne,” she noted. “The prince’s attendant was simply too good at homing in on your weakest points—as I would expect from someone serving royalty. Furthermore, Lord Ferdinand mentioned in his letter that this might actually have been a boon.”

“Hm...? How was it a boon?” I asked, blinking.

Philine’s eyes wavered for a moment before she spoke. “Because, had you not fallen unconscious, you would have agreed to the proposition on the spot without consulting anyone first.”

Whew... He’s right—I really would have. The idea of consulting someone didn’t even cross my mind. Talk about lucky...

“Because you were unconscious, you missed the date you were supposed to leave the Royal Academy,” Rihyarda said. “But as you cannot leave before apologizing to royalty and the greater duchy, Aub Ehrenfest has granted you special permission to extend your stay.” I needed to apologize to the participants of the tea party and inform Adolphine of Drewanchel that I would soon be leaving.

I suppose I should supply mana to the library while visiting to apologize. Maybe I should bring a feystone. Hm... It feels like there’s something else I’m forgetting, but what? What could it be?

As I made my way down to the dining hall, I counted off everything that I needed to do before heading home on my fingers. Cornelius was waiting

by the stairs and stroked my cheek when I reached him, saying he was glad that I had awoken. Apparently, I had almost given him a heart attack.

By the time I entered the dining hall, it was already filled with students eating lunch. Charlotte cried, “Sister!” upon seeing me, and all eyes fell on me at once. Everyone had evidently been informed about my collapse during the tea party.

Charlotte peered down at my face, her indigo eyes stirring with worry. “Should you not still be resting? Being awake does not mean you are well.”

“I feel excellent right now,” I said, smiling for her sake as she touched my forehead and cheeks all over. “I’m sorry that I worried you, Charlotte.”

After performing her checks, Charlotte’s expression relaxed as though her anxiety had finally dissipated. I turned to Wilfried, who paused in the middle of eating.

“I’m sorry for causing more problems, Wilfried.”

“I’m just glad that you woke up,” he replied. “Feeling better, then?”

I nodded, at which point Wilfried returned to his food, describing what had happened at the tea party following Rihyarda’s and my departure. He and Charlotte had explained everything to Hildebrand and the others, with Wilfried recounting how he had accidentally knocked me unconscious in the past by dragging me around at my baptism and pelting me with snowballs. Rather than calming Hildebrand down, however, this just made him exclaim, “How could you do that to her?!”

“The prince was probably in such a panic that he spoke without thinking, but now I can say I’ve had the rare and valuable experience of rushing to help you only to be yelled at by royalty.”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, dear brother.”

The prince had subsequently been chastised by his retainers, and when they eventually departed, Wilfried had tried his best to cheer up Hannelore.

“She kept saying she was fine, since she had experienced you passing out before, but I could guess from the way she was very obviously crying that she wasn’t fine at all. I thought she was going to pass out too.”

In the end, Wilfried had seen Hannelore off to her dorm, much like the year before.

“I handled Professor Solange,” Charlotte said. “It was my first time being at the location of one of your collapses, Sister, and in truth, it was quite disturbing for me as well.”

Now that I thought about it, Charlotte was right—I had never collapsed in front of her before, and I was pretty sure she had never been there for the aftermath either. She had copied Wilfried and emphasized that this happened often, but she had apparently kept thinking about my unconscious form in the jureve and was so afraid that she had wanted to cry herself. And yet, despite her fears, she had put on a brave face and consoled Solange while giving instructions to Brunhilde and the others as they cleaned up the tea party. It was hard to believe that it was her first time having to deal with such an accident.

Geez. Charlotte is way too mature for her age.

"You're going back to Ehrenfest as soon as you've apologized to everyone," Wilfried said. "Alright?"

Hartmut returned to the dorm around when I finished eating and started to deliver his report before even sitting down to have lunch himself. He had gone to his brewing lesson in the morning and stayed after class to speak with Hirschur.

"Lady Rozemyne, Raimund is requesting a meeting so that he can deliver his research results," Hartmut said. "Same for Professor Hirschur. What will you do?"

Oh yeah... The thing I forgot was Hirschur's disciple!

He was the other person I needed to speak with before leaving for Ehrenfest, and finally remembering him took a weight off my shoulders that I hadn't even realized was there.

"I must go to the library tomorrow morning to deliver my mana and some feystones," I said. "Tell them that they can meet with me there."

"Understood," Hartmut replied. "I will send an ordonnanz."

With that, Hartmut swiftly exited the dining hall. I went ahead and asked Lieseleta to prepare some light meals for Hirschur and Raimund in preparation for when we saw them at the library. Something told me that those research-obsessed loons hadn't been eating well.

After lunch, I sent out ordonnanzes explaining my recovery. I also apologized for what had happened during the tea party and for leaving the Academy in such a hurry. They were all near-identical speeches bemoaning my rudeness, with the only variation being in the one I sent to Solange, where I mentioned that I would be coming to supply Schwartz and Weiss

with mana tomorrow morning. I similarly told Adolphine that I was being called back to Ehrenfest due to collapsing at a tea party, and from there, I spent the afternoon finishing my preparations to leave.

"Lady Rozemyne. I am very relieved to see you well."

"My sincerest apologies, Professor Solange. This happens often when my emotions stir, so please do not think too much of it."

I apologized to Solange again—which she received with a thankful sigh—and then handed over a feystone for her to use in my absence. Rihyarda had used feystones to drain my overflowing mana when I was excited for the palace library, so we had several that were completely full.

"Prince Hildebrand and Lady Hannelore are going to be here, so I cannot see you wanting for mana, but I thought I would deliver this just in case," I said.

"I thank you ever so much—although I am more concerned for your health," Solange replied. "Please rest well in Ehrenfest."

I'm pretty sure I'll end up even busier than I am here.

We were in the middle of winter socializing, and there was the Dedication Ritual too. Plus, before I started on any of that, I was sure to receive a massive lecture from my guardians. Not that I would say that out loud when Solange was already so worried about me.

"Hildebrand is here," came Weiss's voice. I turned to the door and saw that the prince really had arrived, with his retainers in tow. It seemed that Schwartz and Weiss could tell the instant their master or any assistant stepped into the library—or more precisely, they could tell where in the library these people were at all times.

"Rozemyne, are you truly well...?" Hildebrand asked. We were the same height, so when he looked at me directly like this, I could see the worry clouding his purple eyes all too clearly.

Yeeeah... I can imagine why this whole thing surprised him so much. I doubt anyone as sickly as me usually spends time with the prince.

Hildebrand may have ended up bedridden on occasion, but I suspected that he had never seen anyone else in such a state—or seen them suddenly fall unconscious, for that matter. It must have been a real shock.

"I apologize for the disturbance," I said. "I am, erm... prone to falling unconscious when emotionally moved. It surprises those who are

unprepared, so we strive to prevent it from happening by any means possible. It seems that our efforts did not suffice this time. I cannot apologize enough."

I also added that the palace library was something of a risky topic for me—but only in my head, of course. I didn't want to give them a reason to take back their invitation.

Hildebrand frantically shook his head from side to side. "It was surprising, but I'm fine now. As a member of the Library Committee, I can't let something like that get in my way—I need to be strong enough to help you."

It's so cute seeing him try to act all manly...

The prince's eyes seemed to burn with resolve as he clenched his fists and swore to never be so panicked again. It was especially cute that this was his idea of getting stronger.

"Please take care of Schwartz and Weiss in my absence," I said. "I can rest assured knowing that you are here for them."

Hildebrand accepted my words with a genuine smile, and at that moment, the library was bathed in light of various colors. Classes were over, which meant Raimund would soon be arriving.

"Erm, Prince Hildebrand... I regret having to say this, but I am due to meet some people here soon."

"Prince Hildebrand, we must not allow too many others to see you. Now that you have confirmed that Lady Rozemyne is well, let us return at once," Arthur said, prompting the regretful-looking prince to leave. He then looked over at me and said, "We are relieved to see that you have recovered."

The bell rang a short while after Hildebrand disappeared from sight, and not too long after that, Hirschur arrived with Raimund. They were both well groomed, perhaps because they were actually having to leave the laboratory today.

These two kinda seem like mother and son... They both have really similar auras as, like, people who are dedicating their lives to science.

"You are leaving especially early this year, Lady Rozemyne," Hirschur said with a displeased expression. "I have not gotten as much work done as I had hoped."

"My guardians back in Ehrenfest are worried about me, considering that I collapsed twice in such quick succession," I replied, of course referring to

the ternisbefallen incident and the tea party that had followed soon after my recovery. I didn't say much more, since it was being kept secret that Ehrenfest students had been involved, but Hirschur understood nonetheless.

"Ferdinand must be at his wits' end with you," she cackled. "Rauffen has been talking about holding an inquiry once you've recovered, but that won't be possible if you are no longer here. Leave things to me."

"You have my thanks."

The order for my return had come while Rauffen and the other professors were getting ready to hold an inquiry about the ternisbefallen incident. To be honest, I appreciated getting the opportunity to discuss things with my guardians first.

With all that out of the way, Hirschur took several of the documents that she was having Raimund carry. "These are the results of my research. Please give them to Ferdinand. We also have with us the assignments that Raimund completed for him."

Raimund took a hesitant step forward, having been more or less pushed by Hirschur, and proffered a bundle of plant paper. "I've made improved versions of the given circles," he said. "Please give these to Lord Ferdinand as well. I would, um... very much appreciate it if you could tell me his thoughts on them."

Hartmut accepted the papers with a nod. He and Raimund seemed to have been speaking behind the scenes quite regularly, and I could see the tension drain from the latter's shoulders.

"Raimund, I am going to be returning to Ehrenfest, but Hartmut will remain here in the Royal Academy to give you your new tasks once they are confirmed," I said. "Please use the time until then to finish your classes, eat well, and rest—to live a proper life, as you would."

"Oh my. Have you become his mother, Lady Rozemyne?" Hirschur asked, exasperated.

I glared at her. She was presumably the reason that Ferdinand was so prone to locking himself away in his workshop, yet we were the ones suffering for it. Hirschur had gotten away scot-free.

"If you do not raise Raimund properly, Professor Hirschur, then there will be very real consequences," I warned. "A person's upbringing has a great impact on their future, so I refuse to remain silent while your disciple's life falls apart. At this rate, he will end up becoming another

Ferdinand.”

“Really?!” Raimund exclaimed, positively delighted.

“I would not sound so pleased—that was *not* meant positively.” I shook my head and then presented the light meals that Lieseleta had prepared. “I imagine you were focused on your research until the last moment before this meeting and therefore made no time for lunch. Please eat this and spend the rest of the day resting.”

“You truly are a saint, Lady Rozemyne. I’m touched,” said not Raimund, but Hirschur, her hands trembling with emotion as she accepted the basket of food. She really was a no-good teacher.

“Professor Hirschur, do not forget about your classes,” I said. “And remember, Raimund—ensuring that your teacher does her job is an important part of being a disciple.”

With that, our meeting came to an end.

“I believe that’s everything...” I said after finishing my last checks on the way to the dormitory’s teleportation room. Wilfried, Charlotte, and my retainers were going to be seeing me off.

“Shouldn’t be anything to worry about if you’ve checked everything on the list,” Wilfried said. “Now head on home and get ready for the scolding of a lifetime. They ordered you to stay away from the prince, you know, and what did you do? You collapsed at a tea party, guaranteeing that he’ll never forget you. Everyone back in Ehrenfest is pretty much banging their head against a wall at this point.”

“Eep...”

Cornelius was on the teleportation circle with me, but he wasn’t going to be staying in Ehrenfest—he intended to enjoy his last term at the Royal Academy to the fullest, meaning he would return to the dormitory as soon as he had ensured my safe arrival. I was heading home so early this year that Judithe and Leonore hadn’t even finished all of their classes yet.

“Damuel and Angelica are in Ehrenfest, so I won’t have any problems with guards, but... going back home by myself makes me feel a little bit lonely...” I admitted.

“Please try to return to us as soon after the Dedication Ritual as possible,” Charlotte said with a smile. I was entrusting Rosina to her in my absence, and it was heartening to know that a fellow female archduke

candidate was going to be here to take my place while I was gone.

“You don’t need to worry about us, Rozemyne—now that we’ve got Charlotte, things won’t be as bad as last year,” Wilfried assured me. “At the very least, I won’t have to go to any of those girl-only tea parties.”

Both Charlotte and I giggled at his remark.

“Rihyarda, Cornelius—let us go,” I said.

I stepped onto the teleportation circle with Rihyarda and Cornelius, and after a sudden flash of black and gold, my vision began to twist...

Epilogue

Every day, reports came from the Royal Academy. Sylvester cleared his office of retainers to read them alone with Karstedt and Ferdinand.

The reports up until classes began were peaceful—Rozemyne rejoiced over the dormitory's new bookcase and was more grateful to Wilfried than ever before, and although Charlotte expressed some concern over Rozemyne's bizarre style of greeting that prioritized books above all else, such things warranted little more than a chuckle. Students of the former Veronica faction had requested to offer their names to Rozemyne, but Rozemyne was exceedingly reluctant to carry such a heavy burden, so that was on hold for now.

Even after the fellowship gatherings, the reports that arrived were still relatively peaceful. It was a surprise that Drewanchel had already managed to emulate rinsham, but that had been expected to happen eventually. There was also a report about how Bettina from Ahrensbach was leaking information, but that, too, was expected—it was the very reason she had married into Ehrenfest in the first place. The only point of worry was that the third prince had attended the fellowship gathering despite having not yet been debuted, but the actual risk was minimal, since he was going to be staying in his room.

"If we do find ourselves with another problem on our hands, it will no doubt be due to Rozemyne somehow getting involved with him," Ferdinand mused.

"Don't say that, Ferdinand!" Sylvester barked. "The prince is staying in his room. They'll never meet. It's just not going to happen! Ever!"

Naturally, Sylvester shared the same fears as Ferdinand. Given how Rozemyne had ended up interacting with royalty the year before, it was impossible to imagine her finishing her second year at the Royal Academy without incident.

Of course, once lessons began, the reports that arrived in Ehrenfest became anything *but* peaceful. Rozemyne dragged a Dunkelfelger archduke

candidate into her so-called “Library Committee,” supplied mana to several magic tools within the library, formed divine instruments in her schtappe-morphing class, attacked a teacher with one of the charms that Ferdinand had given her, and tore apart the canopy of her bed with a toy she had powered up.

Sylvester, Ferdinand, and Karstedt all sighed wearily as they read the incoming reports one after another. There were so many that simply reading them was exhausting.

Sylvester put a hand to his forehead and started massaging his temples. “Ferdinand, why is Rozemyne always so... extreme?”

“Do not ask me. It seems that Rozemyne’s understanding of the word ‘peaceful’ differs considerably from our own. We will need to correct this,” Ferdinand replied, heaving another sigh as he scratched his head. He seemed to be extremely drained.

Karstedt was similarly spent from the daily reports. “To think she’d cause this many problems in less than a week...” he muttered. “I think it’s safe to say she has a talent for troublemaking at this point, which is the last thing we need.”

Sylvester suddenly realized something terrible. Indeed, despite them having received so many reports, not even a week had passed. That explained why they hadn’t yet heard from Hirschur.

Reports continued to flood in. The second-years had all passed their written lessons on the first day, there was a request for advice on dealing with a tea party invitation from Drewanchel, Rozemyne had resolved to accept Roderick’s name, and much was learned from the music professors during their tea party.

The questions regarding tea parties and socializing were sent not just to Sylvester, but to Ferdinand, Florencia, and Elvira as well. Men and women tended to have different perspectives on such matters, and Sylvester believed that having a variety of answers would prove useful.

Ehrenfest’s rise through the Royal Academy’s ranks and its association with new people had made the Archduke Conference a struggle for the adults, so it naturally followed that the children in the Royal Academy would struggle as well. It seemed as though they were better at managing Rozemyne’s words and behavior than they had been the year before, but the

troubling reports continued to flood in. They were received with the usual concerned smiles... but everything changed when Rozemyne encountered the third prince again.

“Rozemyne went to the library to arrange when to change Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes, and while she was there, she seems to have met with Prince Hildebrand. Is this normal? From Charlotte.”

“Rozemyne isn’t worried, and she says they’ll never see each other again, since the prince is avoiding other students. Even so, somehow, I’ve got a bad feeling about this... From Wilfried.”

Your dad does too, Wilfried. I’ve got a really *bad feeling about this...*

“So it finally happened...” Ferdinand said.

“Why are you so calm about this?!”

“So far, they have met with one another, but nothing has happened. The problems are yet to come, and that is why you must calm down, Sylvester. If we panic now, we will not survive the upcoming reports,” Ferdinand replied, waving his hands dismissively. But how could Sylvester remain composed when Rozemyne was somehow meeting with a prince who wasn’t even supposed to be attending the Royal Academy?

“How can I stay calm when you’re saying the bad times have only just begun?!” Sylvester exclaimed. “Now I’m even more worried...”

“Problems will now be occurring at a highly accelerated rate,” Ferdinand continued. “After what we experienced last year, this much should be obvious. Just look at this report from Hartmut if you wish to be terrified even further.” He held out a report with a thin smile. It seemed that he was equally disturbed on the inside; he was just exceptionally good at hiding his emotions.

“Lady Rozemyne began reading immediately after greeting the prince, but he appears to have taken an interest in her, no doubt because she looks as young as he does. He went out of his way to climb to the second floor to watch her read. From Hartmut.”

Sylvester wanted to scream, “Please, can’t you leave my kids alone?!” but he somehow contained the urge. “Ferdinand, do you know a way to keep Rozemyne from ever meeting with the prince again?” he asked.

“As I am sure you know, we cannot just prevent her from going to the library—gaining access to it was the very reason that she passed all of her classes on the first day. Trying to contain her would have too great of an

impact on other things. You do not want to make the same mistake that Wilfried made last year, do you?”

“Ngh...” Sylvester fell silent, recalling how disastrous it had been for everyone when Rozemyne had been kept away from her precious library.

Karstedt shrugged. “There’s no stopping her from visiting the library, and we can’t do anything about the prince’s actions. All we can do is pray to the gods that he contains himself and stays in his room like he should.”

“Praise be to the gods! Prayers to the gods!”

“Aub Ehrenfest, we have an urgent message from the Royal Academy.”

Rozemyne wasn’t the only one causing unnecessary chaos—Hirschur, the Ehrenfest dormitory supervisor, was raising an Ahrensbach student as her primary disciple.

“We were planning to invite Professor Hirschur to the changing of Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes the day after tomorrow, but what should we do? From Marianne.”

“This is a very dangerous situation, as Ehrenfest secrets could be leaking to Ahrensbach through Professor Hirschur’s disciple. Are there any problems with the documents we have already given her? From Ignaz.”

“Is there any way we can turn her disciple, Raimund, into an information source for ourselves? He associates with Professor Gundolf, so I believe he may be leaking our research to Drewanchel as well. From Hartmut.”

“Raimund is very skilled when it comes to modifying magic circles—he improved one of mine and even taught me how to do it myself. Also, he really wants to read Ferdinand’s book. Can I lend it to him? From Rozemyne.”

Sylvester was dumbfounded. *Rozemyne, why are you the only one not worried about this?! Aren’t you the one Ahrensbach ambushed?!* At once, he was struck with the overwhelming urge to scream and poke her cheeks to infinity.

“I understand that she’s moved to the Sovereignty, but I’d rather Hirschur showed our duchy a little more consideration,” Karstedt said. It was an extremely normal reaction for an Ehrenfest noble, but Ferdinand met the remark with a harsh glare.

“Why should she, when Ehrenfest shows her no consideration?” he

replied. “Do not be so self-centered.”

“What do you mean?”

Ferdinand grimaced and then explained. It seemed that back when Hirschur had taken Ferdinand as a disciple, she had ended up being exposed to Veronica’s cruelty as well. She had no longer been able to rest peacefully in the Ehrenfest dormitory, and it was for this reason that she had started sleeping in her laboratory even more regularly than before. Ferdinand dryly noted that the financial support usually given to the dormitory supervisor had promptly been stolen away by those serving Veronica, such that Hirschur received no help whatsoever.

These events had taken place after Sylvester had graduated from the Royal Academy, so he knew very little about Ferdinand and Hirschur’s past. He struggled to believe that Ferdinand had endured so much, considering the man’s achievements—he had come first-in-class every single year, received direct praise from the king himself, formed personal connections with greater duchies, and made an extraordinary amount of wealth for a student by selling magic tools and materials.

“My mother took away the dormitory’s help?” Sylvester asked. “If you knew this, why didn’t you say anything when we imprisoned her? How many years has it been now? How can you be so passive about this when your own teacher is struggling?!”

“Hirschur made it clear that she neither wants nor needs help, as it would only obstruct the raising of her apprentices. It was how she protected me while I was in the Royal Academy,” Ferdinand said. That was why, out of respect, he had supported Hirschur with some of the earnings he made from his magic tools.

Sylvester finally understood why Ferdinand was so close with Hirschur even after his graduation, but at the same time, he felt helpless. “Ferdinand, please... You need to tell me these things sooner,” he said. “I may be the archduke, but I can’t act on a problem I don’t know about. It makes me feel pathetic.”

“The things your mother did are nothing but unpleasant, and I have no wish to remember them. Forgive me,” Ferdinand replied, his voice cracking slightly as he spoke. His eyes were downcast, and his brow was slightly furrowed. Sylvester could hardly press him any further after that.

“You’re forgiven.”

Ferdinand exhaled and then stood. “I will go to the Royal Academy.”

“Wait, Ferdinand! Adults can’t just up and get involved—you know this! That’s why these reports are so painful...” Sylvester was limited to venting his frustrations through replies, as they all presumably were, but Ferdinand waved a hand to dismiss the idea.

“It will not be an issue,” he said. “It is understood that magic tools must be dealt with by those who created them. I will simply exchange a few words with my teacher while I am there. Hirschur will not listen to anyone else. You know this to be true.”

In short, Ferdinand intended to go to the Royal Academy under the guise of retrieving some magic tools he had left with Hirschur.

“Fear not,” Ferdinand reiterated. “We will not bring harm to Ehrenfest.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about,” Sylvester replied. “I thought that speaking with Hirschur might bring back some memories that you’d rather not remember, but... Alright. I’m leaving this to you.”

“A wise choice.”

That same day, Ferdinand sent word that he would soon be coming to the Royal Academy, and the next afternoon, he departed with Eckhart and Justus. He returned at night looking extremely refreshed, and there were a great number of magic tools with him.

The next day, Sylvester learned that his prayers had not reached the gods. Just as he had feared, a report arrived to say that Rozemyne had met with the prince again.

“Today, we changed Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes. I was able to touch them for the very first time, since Lady Rozemyne granted me her permission. The new clothes suit them very well. Prince Hildebrand came to watch midway through, and the next thing we knew, he had agreed to become an assistant for supplying the shumils with mana. From Marianne.”

The prince had arrived midway through the changing... and ended up an assistant?

“Wait a moment!” Sylvester exclaimed. “Rozemyne’s their master, and *the prince* is her assistant?! It’s supposed to be the other way around!”

“It was just yesterday that I went to the Royal Academy to settle problems. How are there new ones already...?” Ferdinand muttered. There was a distant look in his eyes that Sylvester could fully understand.

“Karstedt, read these. This situation is beyond headache-inducing.”

Karstedt accepted the stack of reports; then, he pressed a hand to his forehead and groaned. Sylvester took the reports from the man’s weary free hand and, after pumping himself up, started reading them in turn.

“Rozemyne and Prince Hildebrand were being quite friendly with one another. It seems to me that the prince thinks highly of Rozemyne—his expression when speaking with her was entirely different from when he spoke with Wilfried. She seems to like him in turn; in fact, she was staring at him as intensely as she would stare at a book. She ended up asking me what I thought of younger men. I’ve attempted to guide her back to Wilfried, but he will need the courage to agree that she can do whatever she likes with her own library. From Charlotte.”

“The prince appears to like shumils, but it seems to me that he is more interested in Lady Rozemyne. She, in turn, became enamored by the prospect of the palace library. We must be careful; it seems that the prince mistook Lady Rozemyne for Lady Charlotte, and now, Lady Rozemyne has mistakenly concluded that he is romantically interested in her sister. Afterward, Lady Rozemyne was asked to relinquish her position as the magic tools’ master. She avoided this by pointing out that Prince Hildebrand would struggle to provide the shumils with mana while he is still unable to act publicly and that he would end up being called ‘milady’ despite being male. The prince ultimately settled on helping with the provision of mana as an assistant. From Hartmut.”

“We changed Schwartz’s and Weiss’s clothes today. It turns out that Professor Solange lives in the library. I’m very jealous. I want to live in a library too one day. Oh, also—Prince Hildebrand came when we were changing their clothes. He wanted to know how Charlotte feels about younger men, so I ended up asking her, but it turns out that she’s all about her big bro. I wish she was all about her big sis... From Rozemyne.”

“Is it just me, or does Rozemyne live in an entirely different world from everyone else...?” Sylvester mused aloud. Her report had seemed to be mostly about Solange’s living conditions—which nobody else had even mentioned—and her own plans for the future. The prince’s arrival came across as an afterthought more than anything.

“Rozemyne simply cannot socialize,” Ferdinand said, rubbing his temples.

“And she’s going to be interacting with royalty like this?” Karstedt asked, his hands similarly on his head. “Give me a break. Please.”

“Ferdinand, can you bring Rozemyne back?” Sylvester asked. “At the very least, we need to wait things out until the prince stops visiting the library.”

“She has only recently been allowed to start visiting the library herself, so no. Hm... I suggest we threaten her by saying that we will order her home the next time she does something.”

The three cradled their heads, but this was only the beginning of the chaos.

“Rozemyne sent me these questions,” Ferdinand said.

“I’ve ended up inviting Prince Hildebrand to a tea party in the library. Would it be safe for me to let him borrow some Ehrenfest knight stories? Is there anything I should watch out for? From Rozemyne.”

“How and why did she end up inviting a royal to a tea party?!” Sylvester cried. “Is she just being cocky or what?”

Ehrenfest only ever invited royalty to tea parties during the Archduke Conference. Inviting someone to a tea party was more draining and required a lot more effort than simply being invited, so doing everything to the appropriate standard was going to be impossible for someone like Rozemyne, who couldn’t even manage regular socializing.

“I can imagine her being so focused on her bookworm friend that she ignores the prince entirely...” Ferdinand said, evoking an image that Sylvester could see all too easily. It would be unimaginably rude, but Rozemyne would do it without fail. “Have her decide on discreet signals with her attendants, to be used when she is neglecting the prince too much, the topic needs to be changed, and the like. It would also be wise to bring an abundance of feystones, since her emotions are sure to flare out of control the instant the conversation turns to the exchange of books.”

Together, they wrote up all the plans they could and sent them to Rozemyne’s retainers, making sure to explain in no uncertain terms that Rozemyne was not to neglect the prince in conversation. Soon after they had sent all of their replies, however, they received an emergency letter from Charlotte. This year, it felt as though they were receiving nothing but emergency letters.

“The children of the former Veronica faction left to hunt feybeasts, but Roderick returned injured. Wilfried departed to help the apprentice knights while Sister tended to Roderick, and when she asked Roderick what had happened, we learned that a ternisbefallen was responsible. Sister has since left with her guard knights to grant the apprentices blessings of Darkness. We’ve contacted the professors, but is there anything else I should do? From Charlotte.”

“A ternisbefallen? What even is that?” Sylvester asked, having never heard the name before.

“This is problematic...” Ferdinand muttered and promptly started on his response. He warned the apprentice knights not to attack the ternisbefallen, to take turns provoking it, and to buy time until the Sovereign Knight’s Order arrived. “They are trombe-like feybeasts that appear around Werkestock. Only black weapons work on them.”

“Come again?!” Karstedt exclaimed. “That’s terrible! We must go at once.”

Ferdinand shook his head. “No, Karstedt. We cannot send our own knights. All we can do is rely on the Sovereignty.”

A duchy could only send its Knight’s Order to the Royal Academy at the request of the Sovereignty—doing so under any other circumstances was tantamount to invading Sovereign territory. Karstedt could only watch with gritted teeth as Ferdinand wrote his reply.

As soon as Ferdinand was done, he briskly walked to the teleportation hall and instructed the knight standing guard to deliver his letter. Charlotte’s reply came immediately—likely an indication that she had been waiting by the teleportation room. *“We have already informed them. The ternisbefallen was attacked when it was first encountered and grew as a result, but the apprentices have split into groups and are now stalling for time. From Charlotte.”*

“So, someone there knows of ternisbefallens, hm? They must be quite the academic,” Ferdinand remarked, exhaling in relief.

The three guardians agonized as they awaited the next update, and after what felt like an age, another report arrived. *“They defeated the ternisbefallen, but Sister collapsed. Nobody else was hurt. From Charlotte.”*

“As long as the ternisbefallen was defeated, we must be satisfied. As

worried as I am about Rozemyne, her collapsing is nothing new," Karstedt said. He had waited on tenterhooks, itching to leap up and rush over with reinforcements, but now the tension drained from his shoulders. Sylvester, too, was relieved.

A new day brought with it new reports.

"I made the necessary preparations and headed out as soon as Roderick told us what happened. Matthias said we needed to buy time until the professors arrived, so I suggested that we take turns dealing with the ternisbefallen. Rozemyne arrived while we were doing that, and she blessed our weapons with Darkness, enabling us to start attacking. The beast was hard to hit, since it moved so fast, but Rozemyne managed to block its vision with a black cloth midway through the fight, allowing us to launch a massive attack all at once. It was my first battle, but my contributions came in second place. From Wilfried."

"Lady Rozemyne truly is a saint. Her expression was impeccably heroic as she blessed the weapons with Darkness, and the words of her prayer were as fluid and majestic as if she had been playing an instrument. The ternisbefallen was clearly more on guard against Lady Rozemyne than anyone else; it carelessly took blows from the other knights but was fixated on avoiding her water gun. Upon deducing that her attacks would continue to be evaded, Lady Rozemyne restrained the ternisbefallen with the God of Darkness's divine instrument. If not for her contribution, we would not have been able to defeat the beast. And that is not all—Lady Rozemyne also produced Flutrane's staff and, through a ritual, completely repaired the gathering spot. I saw a divine miracle with my own eyes, and it was extraordinary! Praise be to the gods! From Hartmut."

"By the time the professors and the Sovereign knights arrived, the battle was already over. They sent out inquiries regarding the details of the hunt and Ehrenfest's temple affairs, and it seems that the ternisbefallen came from the direction of the Werkestock Dormitory. Students should not be able to use the Darkness blessing, so publicly, the story is that the Sovereign Knight's Order defeated the ternisbefallen. From Charlotte."

"Are you sure these reports are all about the same thing...?" Sylvester asked.

"There is no doubting it, considering that the ternisbefallen is mentioned

in each one," Ferdinand replied. But even then, it was hard to believe.

"Well, they did a good job," Karstedt said. "That much is for sure."

"Yep. That's not a feybeast students should normally come across. Seems like they'll make good trombe hunters when they grow up," Sylvester agreed with a nod, but Ferdinand was rubbing his temples and grumbling.

"Sylvester, call Rozemyne back as soon as she recovers," he said. "We must discuss things at once."

"Hrm?"

"The blessing. I expect that Rozemyne used the prayer directly from the bible, which differs somewhat from the spell taught to knights. I wish to speak with her regarding this before she is questioned."

And so, as per this suggestion, Sylvester ordered Rozemyne to return.

Despite Rozemyne having been ordered to return as soon as her tea party with the prince was complete, what came through the teleportation circle was instead a stack of papers. Ferdinand thumbed through them, then squeezed his eyes shut and said, "Let us return to your office, Aub Ehrenfest," with a smile that did not reach his eyes. It seemed that more problems had occurred.

Once they were in Sylvester's office, Ferdinand started reading a report from Hartmut aloud. Dunkelfelger's archduke candidate was registered as an assistant before the tea party began, the prince wanted a Library Committee armband, and Rozemyne had promised to get him one.

What is Rozemyne thinking...? Last year, there was the whole thing with the hairpins, and now she's taking business orders from royalty again. Gah, of course. She isn't *thinking.*

Sylvester vigorously massaged his forehead as he read the reports, but it seemed that Ferdinand wasn't content to let their suffering end there. "As they were peacefully discussing books, Rozemyne suddenly suggested that the prince send out ordonnanzes telling students to return their overdue books."

"Whaaat?!" Karstedt shouted on instinct.

"She dumped work on *royalty*?!" Sylvester cried out at almost the same time. "What was she thinking?!"

"Everyone else there no doubt thought the same," Ferdinand said. "I

shall continue reading the report."

"I don't wanna hear it, but"—Sylvester took a moment to brace himself—"alright. Go on."

A member of royalty would normally be enraged to receive such a brazen request, but the prince had rejoiced over Rozemyne's nonstandard suggestion and said that he would consult the king. It was all so sudden and so bizarre that nobody on either side had been able to comprehend what was going on, let alone stop them.

"Even the prince's retainers were dazed, it seems. We are lucky that Rozemyne avoided a rebuke here," Ferdinand said.

"Lucky, sure, but am I the only one who's starting to think this Rozemyne-prince combo is dangerous?" Sylvester replied. Maybe because Prince Hildebrand was raised as a vassal to begin with, he didn't have much of the dignity or pride that one expected from royalty. Otherwise, he never would have rejoiced over Rozemyne's insulting proposition.

"The more dangerous we believe the situation is and the more we try to pull them apart, the closer Rozemyne will end up becoming with him," Ferdinand warned.

"At the moment, I'm just grateful that I'm not one of the retainers having to attend these tea parties," Karstedt said. "Though, in an ideal world, I wouldn't even have to read these reports."

"We would not allow you, alone, to escape this burden. Give up and endure; this is your daughter," Ferdinand replied with a scoff.

Sylvester wanted to say, "Yeah, and you're her guardian," but he stayed quiet and simply listened as Ferdinand continued to summarize the report.

"It seems that Rozemyne needed to use a feystone while exchanging books with Dunkelfelger, as Lady Hannelore praised the quality of our duchy's books."

"She needed a feystone after just a little praise?" Sylvester asked. "Good thing we made sure she had them on hand."

"I recall that simply becoming friends with Lady Hannelore was enough to make her pass out last year."

Sylvester grimaced. "She passed out because of that? I've gotta say, this Lady Hannelore must have a pretty strong spirit. I wouldn't want a friend who could collapse at the drop of a hat."

"She is from Dunkelfelger—her fearlessness should come as no

surprise.”

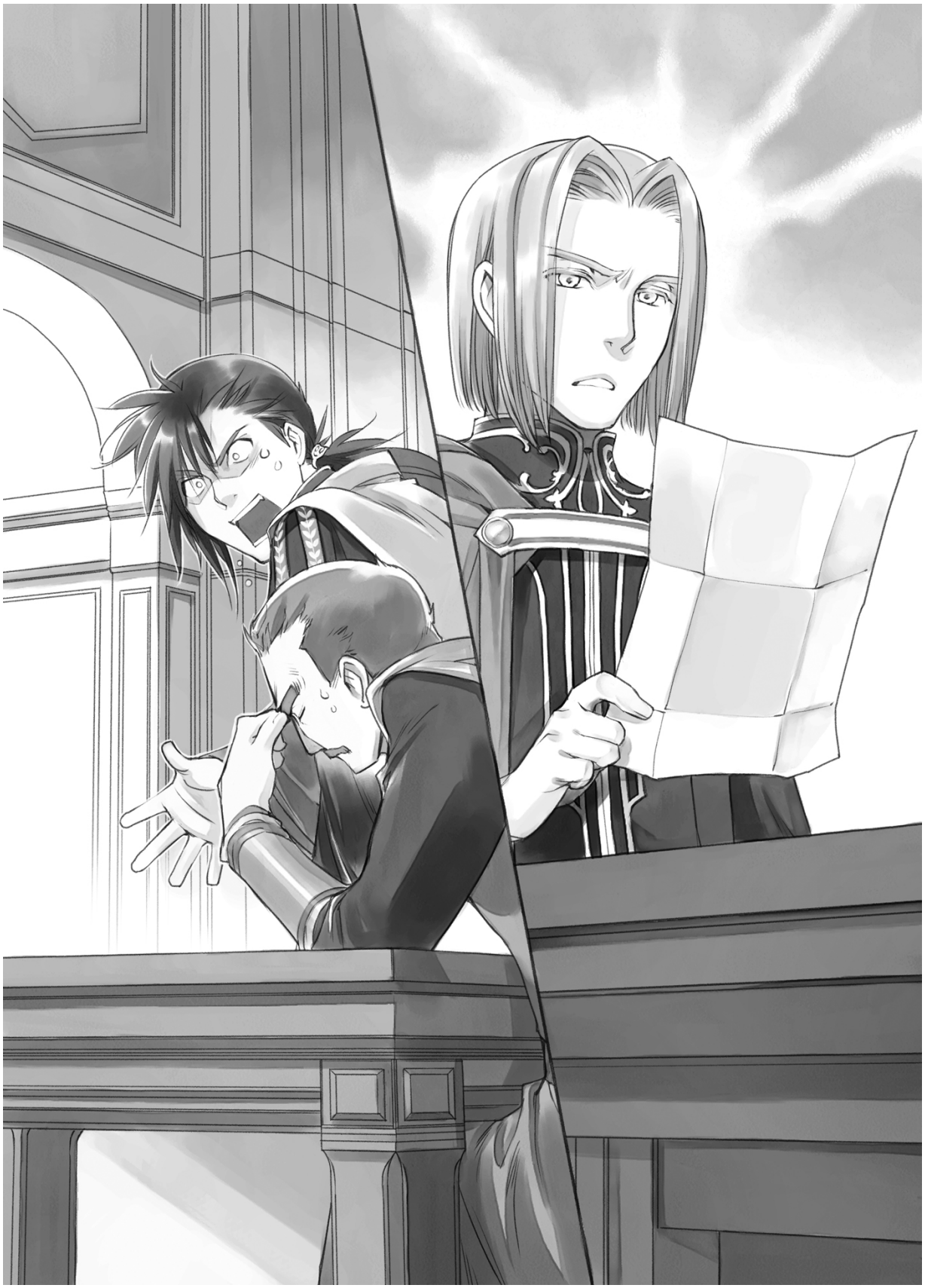
Karstedt’s expression turned contemplative. “It’s hard to tell whether Rozemyne is maturing or regressing. She’s passing out more often than she used to before the jureve,” he said.

“Her body is stronger, but she has more mana as well. She is not collapsing any more or less frequently than before,” Ferdinand said with a slightly bitter expression and then returned his attention to the report. “Hm... It seems that, when Rozemyne and Lady Hannelore were exchanging books, Prince Hildebrand grew somewhat envious and mentioned that he wished to be involved as well. One of the prince’s retainers suggested that Rozemyne be invited to the palace library, and in that instant, Rozemyne fell unconscious.”

“She collapsed in front of royalty *again*?!”

“She collapsed while hosting a tea party *again*?!”

Sylvester and Karstedt shouted at the same time, while Ferdinand frowned and glared at the report.



“How on earth did the tea party continue from there?” Sylvester asked, impatiently snatching the report from Ferdinand. “How was it suspended, and what happened during the aftermath?”

“The Sovereign retainers were in disarray, the prince wept, and Lady Hannelore repeated that she was fine as she attempted to stifle a sob. We sought assistance from Lord Wilfried and Lady Charlotte, who swiftly arrived to handle the matter. From Hartmut.”

Wilfried and Charlotte, huh...? I get the feeling that they’ve aged a few years just from dealing with Rozemyne.

“That was one heck of a tea party...” Sylvester muttered. “So, what’s our plan?”

“We must demand a mountain of answers from Rozemyne before we can decide what action to take,” Ferdinand replied. “For now, have her apologize to those involved and order her to return. If we do this immediately, we can use her collapsing as an excuse. My intention was to send her back to the Royal Academy after hearing the circumstances, but that idea is now dead in the water. We will keep her in Ehrenfest until the Dedication Ritual concludes.” His tone made it clear that he had almost given up and was throwing things at the wall to see what stuck, if anything.

Sylvester wanted to give up too; his head ached worse than last year. Karstedt seemed afraid to speak at all, which Sylvester likewise empathized with.

How...? How does Rozemyne cause so many problems like this?

Peaceful—if a word existed that was an antonym to Rozemyne, it was “peaceful.”

Unshakeable Resolve

“You have already been giving me that which I desire most,” Lady Rozemyne said to me. “I will accept your name alongside your stories.”

Her words entered my ears and diffused through my very being. Back when I had first voiced my desire to give Lady Rozemyne my name, her golden eyes had clouded over with concern and reluctance, but now they were brimming with compassion and resolve. They crinkled softly as she regarded me with a warm smile.

She accepted not just my stories, but me as well.

Ever since the Ivory Tower incident, I had spent years in isolation. My father beat me, and even those of my own faction ostracized me. My only respite was the book that Lady Rozemyne had made with my story—it gave me greater joy than absolutely anything else.

How should I express this happiness...?

I wanted to put my feelings into words, but none came to mind. Perhaps that was to be expected; surely no one else could understand the relief and sheer depth of emotion that was coursing through me. I simply wanted to relish the joy... but whenever Lady Rozemyne asked me about my family, I remembered my father—I remembered the way he had so suddenly turned his back on me and resorted to physical abuse. A sense of panic crawled up my spine and seized me by the heart.

Please, stop...

I could tell that Father and the others were trying to exploit me to get closer to the archducal family, now that they had lost their places in the former Veronica faction. It was disgusting and an affront to the compassion that Lady Rozemyne had shown me.

“I ask that you allow me to leave my home upon receiving my name,” I said. Lady Rozemyne accepted my request, and for a moment, I could feel at peace. I wouldn’t let Father do as he pleased again; I would ensure that Lady Rozemyne didn’t get wrapped up in his putrid schemes.

“Isn’t this great, Roderick?” Philine asked. “I’m so happy for you.”

“Thanks, Philine,” I replied, genuinely appreciative. I had spent so long selfishly envying her, such that even when she had worried about me, I hadn’t been able to accept how she felt. But now, I could accept her congratulations without any hard feelings. I was more surprised at this change of heart than anyone. I no longer viewed things through the bitter lens of cynicism—I simply felt happy.

However, to my regret, it seemed that Philine was the only one who was pleased for me. Most of Lady Rozemyne’s retainers were associated with the Leisegangs, who were so untrusting of the former Veronica faction that they suspected even those who gave up their names. I was summoned to a conference room during Lady Rozemyne’s bath, when she would not notice their absence or what they were doing. Four archnobles—Lord Cornelius, Lord Hartmut, Lady Brunhilde, and Lady Leonore—looked upon me with harsh expressions. There wasn’t a single mednoble in the world who wouldn’t cower at least somewhat before this lineup.

I swallowed hard, and the joy that had filled my heart soon gave way to worry. Would it even be possible for me to get along with Lady Rozemyne’s retainers after giving her my name?

“There is still time, Roderick,” Cornelius said. He was the first to break the silence and watched me with hard, dark eyes. “Won’t you rethink this decision to give Lady Rozemyne your name? There are a lot of people who won’t take kindly to the idea of you doing this to become her retainer. It seems to me that you just aren’t thinking straight.”

His attempted intimidation was presumably because he didn’t like me, but I wasn’t going to surrender so easily. Others had said the same things to me countless times before.

“Lady Rozemyne has agreed to accept my name,” I replied, “and I have no intention of changing my mind. If you would rather this not happen, speak with Lady Rozemyne.”

Lady Brunhilde drew her eyebrows together in a look of displeasure. “I can see nothing but problems arising from this,” she said. “I shan’t oppose it openly, for Lady Rozemyne has made her decision, but I would very much like to.”

“Oh my...” Lady Leonore added. “I personally consider him preferable to someone like Traugott, as he will at least be name-sworn. However, even without this faction business, I imagine that Lord Wilfried will not

appreciate his being here; I can only hope it will not sow seeds of conflict in his engagement with Lady Rozemyne. Hartmut, what are your thoughts?”

I glanced up with a start. I was the one who had guided Lord Wilfried to the Ivory Tower—albeit at my father’s orders—so I had been made to take full responsibility for his fall from grace. In other words, there would be no better source of discord between him and his fiancée. I hadn’t thought about things from that perspective, so concern suddenly flared in my mind. Although I didn’t intend to stop the name-swearing, I had no idea how my relationship with Lord Wilfried would develop. I peered at Lord Hartmut, whom Lady Leonore had asked for an opinion.

In truth, I was more worried about Lord Hartmut than anyone. He was a skilled archscholar and would act as my boss, assuming that I became Lady Rozemyne’s apprentice medscholar. Out of all her retainers, my relationship with him was the most important. He would often narrow his orange eyes at me whenever I spoke with Philine and seeing how sharp they were right now reminded me of that.

The other day, Hartmut had advised me to voice my true thoughts and feelings to Lady Rozemyne, as only then would she accept me. It was a kind gesture, but I suspected that his motivations weren’t wholly altruistic. A breath later, he had said, “You’ll only get in our way if you continue to drag your feet. Make your choice now and get it over with.”

Will this be okay...?

I was perfectly aware that I wouldn’t be welcomed with open arms, but I didn’t want to be blatantly ostracized or bullied. I was at an overwhelming disadvantage here in terms of status.

Upon noticing my gaze, Lord Hartmut smiled. “Lady Rozemyne does not consider factions; she sees only individuals,” he said. “For that reason, why would I ever oppose someone she has decided to accept?”

“My, how surprising. To think you would offer so little resistance,” Lady Brunhilde said, widening her eyes and placing a hand over her mouth in shock. I was just as taken aback—I had assumed that he would be more annoyed than anyone.

Lord Hartmut raised an eyebrow and turned to Lady Brunhilde, offended. “You find this surprising?” he asked. “Once I graduate, Lady Rozemyne will only have Philine, a laynoble, as an apprentice scholar. I would rather she have an apprentice archscholar here, but there is nobody

who would suit the role. So, what choice do I have but to raise Roderick before next year? His mana quantity may be closer to that of a laynoble, but he is a mednoble all the same."

"The lack of apprentice scholars certainly is an epidemic. If you wish to raise him, Hartmut, I will accept that—especially as it seems that his resolve has not shattered even in the presence of so many archnobles," Lady Brunhilde said with resignation.

Lady Leonore giggled, and with that, the girls became a lot more welcoming. I wondered if they had been testing me to see whether my resolve was strong enough, and as I considered the likelihood of that being the case, Lord Hartmut and Lord Cornelius stepped forward. Lord Hartmut was holding out a small slip of paper.

"Roderick, you said that you don't know how to make a name-swearing stone, right?" Lord Hartmut asked. "I'll teach you later, so gather everything that is listed on this paper as soon as possible. The Royal Academy has a lot of good ingredients that Ehrenfest does not."

"Thank you, Lord Hartmut." I accepted the paper with trembling hands. It was like a test that I needed to pass in order to become Lady Rozemyne's retainer.

"Listen well, Roderick," Cornelius said. "We retainers won't help you with your gathering because we don't want others who wish to offer their name asking for our help too. Hire some apprentice knights to accompany you to the gathering spot and gather the ingredients you need on your own."

"Understood. It will be done, Lord Cornelius."

I had spent an entire year writing new stories to give to Lady Rozemyne, and she had said that she would accept my name. They would teach me how to make the stone so long as I gathered the ingredients.

Just a little more to do!

Although the finish line was in sight, the final stretch wasn't easy. Collecting the ingredients that Lord Hartmut had told me to fetch was too hard for me to do alone as an apprentice scholar. Some of the feystones described needed to be taken from hunted feybeasts, which meant I would need to hire some apprentice knights to kill the feybeasts and then give me the stones, but I didn't have the money to pay them. My earnings from transcribing books had already been spent on basic necessities, and with my

focus having been on writing stories for Lady Rozemyne rather than doing much transcribing work, I hadn't earned all that much in the first place.

This isn't good...

Not knowing what else to do, I spent the following days working to transcribe books so I could earn as much money as possible. On one day in particular, the dormitory was abuzz with news that Professor Hirschur had taken an Ahrensbach apprentice scholar as a disciple. Lord Ferdinand would apparently be coming from Ehrenfest and Professor Hirschur from her laboratory in the scholar building to have a discussion. Even we regular students could tell how big of a deal this was—those two were never in the dormitory, and now they were both going to be here at once.

Seems like the archducal family is a long way away from trusting Ahrensbach again...

The nobles of the former Veronica faction were hoping that two brides from Ahrensbach being wed into the duchy would renew our relationship with Ahrensbach, but judging by how the archducal family, their retainers, and Lord Ferdinand remained so cautious, that future would not be coming anytime soon. It would take a lot more for them to lower their guard.

I viewed the impromptu meeting as something that wasn't my problem—and it wasn't, until Lord Hartmut called me over.

"Roderick, have you gathered the ingredients yet?"

"No, not yet."

I wanted to gather all of the ingredients I needed in one go, since paying for guards was so expensive. To achieve this, I had spent my time thus far researching the ingredients; I had yet to even step foot in the gathering spot.

"In order to minimize contact between Raimund and Lady Rozemyne, we scholars are going to be acting as a bridge between them. There's now a lot more that you need to learn before next year, including how to gather information on Ahrensbach and how to watch out for what information Professor Hirschur might be leaking. We can't just sit back and wait until next year to begin anymore. Get your ingredients gathered, fast."

"That's much easier said than done. Archnobles may have a great deal of money on hand, but I cannot afford to hire guard knights to protect me or hunt feybeasts. I will not be able to gather my ingredients until after I have earned enough from my transcribing."

"You must be dull in the head," Hartmut said, fixing me with a scornful

glare. “Status has nothing to do with it. If you don’t learn to use all of your knowledge and connections to make money, you will never survive as Lady Rozemyne’s scholar. I’ll teach you what to do this time, but learn to use your brain from then onward.”

Following Lord Hartmut’s instruction, I gathered the apprentice knights of the former Veronica faction who were looking for a means to speak with Lady Rozemyne’s retainers and deliver a letter to the archduke by the end of summer. Lord Matthias and Lord Laurenz were among them.

“Lady Rozemyne has elected to accept my name,” I said. “I must now gather ingredients for my name-swearing feystone, and to that end, I wish to hire you as guards and as hunters. However, I will not be paying with money. Instead, I will instruct you on how to make your own name-swearing feystones and will vow to serve as your liaison with Lady Rozemyne upon becoming her retainer.”

As expected, the apprentice knights grimaced in response. I continued to speak, straightening my back to look more imposing and taking care not to let my voice shake.

“Is it not in your best interests to prepare your ingredients sooner rather than later? Did we not write our letter to the aub with resolve in our hearts, knowing that we were contradicting our parents?”

“Roderick, are you blackmailing us?!” Lord Laurenz exclaimed.

“Calm yourself, Lord Laurenz. I am merely offering some advice,” I replied, almost disgusted at my own sophistry. From their perspective, I was obviously threatening to tell their parents what they had done unless they came gathering with me.

Lord Matthias, who had been listening with crossed arms, narrowed his blue eyes at me. “Roderick, those aren’t your words, are they?” he said. “Out of all Lady Rozemyne’s retainers... I suppose Lady Leonore or Lady Brunhilde might have told you to say that? No, considering how you wove threats into your euphemisms, it was probably Lord Hartmut.”

“You are as astute as ever, Lord Matthias,” I remarked. After spending so long at the bottom of the former Veronica faction, I hadn’t even considered threatening them. I didn’t specify who exactly had given me the instructions, but Matthias understood anyway.

“We don’t want to go up against Lord Hartmut,” he said. “Let’s do as he

says and go gathering."

"But, Matthias!" Lord Laurenz protested.

"Part of our compensation is Roderick serving as our liaison with Lady Rozemyne. Given the current incident with Professor Hirschur's disciple, it isn't a bad idea for us to prepare an emergency exit." Lord Matthias then looked at me again, his eyes more scrutinizing than before. "But make no mistake, Roderick—I told you to be careful. You should stop after you get your ingredients. You can't give your name to someone on a whim like this."

His warning came to mind, but I had no intention of changing my decision. "I understand that you are concerned for me, Lord Matthias, but that advice is not applicable," I said. "It may seem I am doing this due to inertia, but I have spent an entire year searching for a way to serve Lady Rozemyne. If giving her my name will earn me her trust, then that is what I shall do."

Lord Matthias's eyebrow twitched. "And what will you do when politics change? Regrets won't save you then."

"Are you again referring to that man? I doubt he regrets giving his name simply because the political landscape has shifted. I imagine that his loyal heart did not falter even when the one he is sworn to left for another duchy. He presumably spends his time thinking of what he can do for them and whether there is any way he can prove himself to be useful."

The word "frustration" couldn't even begin to describe how someone would feel if their lord or lady were taken from their position as the next archduke and sent to another duchy. True, there would be a great deal to think about—such as whether their service had truly been enough or whether there was something else they could have done—but their loyalty would never change. They would remain dedicated no matter the situation, for that was simply how much resolve was needed before a person offered their name.

"Have you not considered your family...?" Lord Matthias asked in what was almost a low growl. I thought back to my family and gave a bitter smile. There was my selfish, violent father, and my mother, who had readily changed to match. There was no place for me back home. Had there been one, I wouldn't have so desperately sought for somewhere with Lady Rozemyne.

“Do you think they would do anything for me?” I asked. “I intend to cut my family off soon. I will not forgive them bringing misfortune to my lady.”

“But, that would...” Lord Matthias began, his blue eyes hardening. He had gone pale, and it was clear that he had more to say, but I was fully resolved to give Lady Rozemyne my name. Our conversation was going nowhere, and there was no point in us talking further.

“I wish to give my name, and that wish is who I am,” I said. “Nobody can change that except Lady Rozemyne.”

“Roderick’s right,” Lord Laurenz interjected, patting Lord Matthias on the shoulder. “Leave things at that, Matthias. Name-swearing is supposed to be a private matter. It’s not right for us to get in the way of something they’ve decided for themselves.”

“Laurenz...”

Lord Laurenz turned his orange eyes to me. “I think it’s a good thing that Lady Rozemyne resolved to take your name. We can watch you to find out a lot of the things we want to know—how the archducal family views students of the former Veronica faction, how they intend to treat us, and how people will react to that. What’s important here, Matthias, is where Roderick ends up, and that’s not something for us to interfere with. Am I wrong?”

“Are you telling me to exploit him...?” Lord Matthias asked.

“Hey, he’s exploiting us for his gathering. Birds of a feather, right? And either way, it doesn’t look like there’s anything we can do to change Roderick’s mind.” Lord Laurenz was looking at me carefully as he spoke, seemingly trying to observe even the most minute reaction.

He was right—at this point, it frustrated me to no end to be exploited, but I was already exploiting them to gather my ingredients, so we were indeed birds of a feather. If they wanted to exploit me, they were more than welcome to. I would just keep working to achieve my goals.

“Alright, then. Let’s go.”

That Earthday, I produced my highbeast at Lord Matthias’s signal. I took to the skies with the apprentice knights consisting mostly of those from the former Veronica faction, and together we flew into the gathering spot... not noticing the long black line that was leading into it.

Investigating the Former Werkestock Dormitory

“Ah, Professor Rauffen?”

I had knocked on the door to Hirschur’s laboratory, only to be met with a boy dressed in brewing gear and wearing an Ahrensbach scarf. He was presumably Hirschur’s disciple. He wasn’t in any of the years I taught, so I didn’t recognize his face or know his name.

“Professor Hirschur, it’s Professor Rauffen,” the boy said. “Doesn’t that mean it’s time?”

“One moment,” came Hirschur’s voice. “I’m currently on a roll.”

“My apologies, but if you would wait just—”

Before the disciple could finish, I threw the door open and stepped into the laboratory, which was a complete mess. Hirschur’s attendant was nowhere to be seen.

“If you’re her disciple, you’ll need to remember this well: you can never believe Hirschur when she says that she’ll only be a moment,” I said. “She might as well have said that she’ll never be ready. You can trust me, because I’ve been through it all myself. Besides, I came here expecting to have to drag her out, so I’m not gonna be doing any waiting.”

“P-Please don’t,” the disciple stammered as I marched deeper into the room. “The professor is in the middle of some very important brewing.”

Even as I approached, Hirschur continued to stir, her focus unbending. There were several magic circles floating above her pot, and I immediately determined that it would be dangerous to interrupt things by pulling her away.

Alright... How am I gonna deal with this?

“Hirschur, it’s your job to clean up after the Ehrenfest students’ messes,” I said.

“I know, and that is why I made preparations to do just that. Now, I believe that we agreed on third bell. Do not interrupt me until it rings, if you

will.”

It was clear to see from the fact that Hirschur’s attendant had cleaned her up that she hadn’t forgotten her schedule. I had wanted us to arrive at the central building before the bells rang, but there was no helping that now.

“It’s on you when Fraularm screeches at us for being late,” I warned.

“Her screeching does not impact me, so I will simply ignore her.” Just the thought of those shrieks ringing in my ears made me miserable, but Hirschur didn’t seem bothered in the slightest.

“You can ignore those awful sounds...?”

“I find you infinitely more annoying, Rauffen, as you are interrupting my brewing.”

I suppose she needs to have such a thick skin when she’s always doing what she wants like this.

After being shooed away by Hirschur, I asked her disciple where I could wait. In this disastrous laboratory, all of the seats normally reserved for visitors were piled with wooden boards.

“You’re going to wait here...?” the disciple asked. “There’s nowhere proper to sit since Lady Rozemyne’s been too sick to visit for days now, and her attendants don’t usually come in until Professor Hirschur finishes her brewing.”

I grimaced and looked around. The closest thing to a proper seat was the chair that Hirschur seemed to use herself. “I can’t leave, otherwise she’ll start on another brew,” I said. “I’ve got no choice but to wait here. Again, speaking from experience.”

I sat down on Hirschur’s chair, but it was hard to believe that this place could accommodate visitors at all. Even the men’s waiting room in the knight dormitory was better kept than this mess. Hirschur’s laboratory was just awful all around.

I used my time spent waiting to think over today’s schedule. We were going to be investigating the Werkestock Dormitory, since ternisbefallens lived in old Werkestock, and there was a trail leading from its sealed-off dormitory to Ehrenfest’s gathering spot. That was enough evidence for the king to grant his permission for us to investigate the dormitory under the watch of the Sovereign Knight’s Order.

Three possible explanations for the ternisbefallen’s sudden appearance were being considered—someone had deliberately brought one onto the

Academy’s grounds, there was a nest near the dorm, or some ungodly series of coincidences had resulted in the beast activating the teleportation circle in the old Werkestock Castle. As far-fetched as that third option sounded, they were feybeasts, which meant they had mana. And according to those managing the old Werkestock Castle, although it was unlikely, it couldn’t be completely discounted.

Hopefully this problem solves itself once we’re there, but I can’t imagine it will.

It was hard to believe that we’d see any results, considering that the selection of professors for this mission was absolutely terrible. First was Hirschur. We were already fighting tooth and nail just to get her involved, and since it meant stepping away from her research, she wasn’t interested at all. Of course, she didn’t really have a choice in the matter, since this ternisbefallen incident was connected to Ehrenfest.

Next was Fraularm, who was furious that Ahrensbach was being considered a suspect just because they managed the old Werkestock Dormitory. She had shrieked in protest during our meeting, and I could tell that she was going to be just as furious for the duration of our investigation. I didn’t even want to get close to her, since just having to endure her voice was enough to tire me out.

Third was Gundolf, the dormitory supervisor for Drewanchel and a professor of the scholar course. We hadn’t spoken much before, owing to the fact that we taught different years and courses. He had enthusiastically volunteered for this mission because it involved a rare feybeast that he wouldn’t normally have a chance to see. I got the feeling that he was going to prioritize researching it over investigating the cause of the incident.

And finally, there was me. Renatus would normally have been involved in the investigation, since he was the one who had gotten Lady Charlotte’s ordonnanz, but he was the oldest professor on the knight course. I was taking his place for the on-site investigation with the Sovereign Knight’s Order, but I knew better than anyone that I wasn’t suited to a brainy mission like this. I could hunt feybeasts with my eyes closed, but investigating a dormitory for clues was another story entirely.

In other words, this group was doomed to squabble and make no progress whatsoever. It didn’t take a genius to figure that out.

“It’s third bell, Hirschur. Let’s go. I’m not waiting any longer.”

“Good grief. Your impatience is the reason women are so keen to avoid you, you know.”

She didn’t need to say that...

Hirschur made no attempt to hide her bitter expression as she stepped away from the brewing pot, but it seemed that she actually had managed to finish before the bells rang. Her talent and general competence made it hard to get mad at her, which was irritating. Still, it didn’t stop me from pretty much dragging her out of the laboratory. Even as we started on our way to the central building, I noticed her glancing back enviously at her research-focused disciple.

“I’d rather you didn’t keep wasting my time like this,” I said as we walked.

“Oh my. Such a selfish remark. I think you’ll find that *I* am the one having my time wasted. The ternisbefallen is dead and buried. If more arise, we need only slay them as well, and that is that.”

I may not have been all that impressed with how she always pushed her work onto other people, but I agreed with her in principle. If a feybeast shows up, kill it. Life would be so much easier if things were that simple.

“I can tell you’ve already settled your thoughts on the matter, but we’ve still got to figure out how this happened,” I said. “That’s why we asked the king through the Sovereign Knight’s Order to unlock the door to the old Werkestock Dormitory. Not to mention, there are a lot of questions that Lady Rozemyne never answered, and we still need to question her. You need to be here as the dormitory supervisor.”

“Oh yes, another issue that you lot keep droning on about. Just how much of my research time do you intend to waste? Can we *at least* postpone the inquiry?” Hirschur grumbled.

“The inquiry has already been postponed once for Lady Rozemyne’s tea party, since Prince Hildebrand refused to budge on the matter. We’re not gonna put it off even longer.”

“How unfortunate,” Hirschur replied with a smirk that made her true feelings more than clear.

We continued through the central building and eventually reached the corridor lined with doors. The nearest door led to the dormitory of the First, the one beside that to the Second, and so on. Soon enough, we reached the doors without numbers. These led to the fallen duchies, and one of them

belonged to the old Werkestock Dormitory. A Sovereign knight was standing in front of it.

“The other professors have already arrived. Do come in,” the knight said and opened the door for us. We went inside and found that there was already an argument going on. There were two Sovereign knights, Gundolf, and Fraularm.

“What’s going on here?” I asked.

Gundolf was stroking his beard and staring at Fraularm through narrowed eyes. “As soon as we entered the dormitory, Professor Fraularm cast waschen,” he said.

“She what...?”

We were here to look for traces of the ternisbefallen and any criminals related to its sudden appearance. Casting waschen would erase all of our potential evidence.

“What in the world were you thinking?!” I exclaimed.

“Goodness! How can you expect me to enter such a filthy place without cleansing it first?!” she screeched at me. “My clothes would have been ruined!”

That was far from being a good enough excuse. If she couldn’t tolerate her clothes getting dirty, then she was just getting in the way. I wanted to insinuate that she should get out, but I knew that she would just explode at me about how she was going to clear Ahrensbach’s name, no matter what. It was obvious now why Gundolf and the Sovereign knights looked so vacant; Fraularm was beyond communication.

However, it seemed as though Fraularm was feeling the same irritation as we were. She looked to Hirschur, who was keeping her distance in an attempt to remain uninvolved, and sought her agreement as a fellow woman.

“You understand my feelings here, do you not?!”

“In truth, this place doesn’t seem particularly dirty to me,” Hirschur replied.

No wonder. This is nothing compared to the garbage heap where you live.

There was no point in seeking camaraderie from Hirschur, even if an average noblewoman would normally agree. She had an even greater tolerance for filth than I did.

“If you are that concerned about cleanliness, then you need only wear brewing clothes or some other garments that you would not mind getting dirty,” Hirschur continued. “Casting waschen will only make it seem that you are destroying evidence.”

“Goodness! I refuse to accept that from someone who could not even arrive on time!”

Hirschur was in the right here, but Fraularm was driven entirely by feelings—facts just wouldn’t get through to her. And she would only become more emotional the more she spoke with Hirschur, so I signaled Gundolf to help me defuse the situation.

“We’ll never finish if we spend all day arguing among ourselves,” I said. “I say we split into groups.”

“Indeed,” Gundolf agreed. “You may work with Professor Hirschur, and I with Professor Fraularm. Ideally, we could have one Sovereign knight overseeing each group.”

The Sovereign Knight’s Order had sent knights to watch us not just to make sure we didn’t conceal any evidence, but also to ensure that we didn’t try to pocket the rare tools and materials littered about the dormitory. Professors generally put their research above everything else, and for that reason, they needed someone to keep a close eye on them.

“We shall cover the first floor, now that it is clean. Those who care not about filth may wallow in the kitchen, the cellar, and the like,” Fraularm said, smugly puffing out her chest for some reason. Arguing with her would only be a waste of time, so Hirschur and I walked away in search of stairs to the basement.

Fraularm’s waschen had cleaned only the entrance hall and the first floor’s hallway, so the rest of the dormitory was still in a complete state. We opened one door and found that the room behind it was thick with dust. The furniture was either broken or collapsed, and there was a door to a hidden room that was still registered despite its master no longer being alive.

“This place sure is a mess...” I said.

“Well, Werkestock fought until the bitter end,” Hirschur replied. “Such is the power of a greater duchy.”

All of a sudden, I recalled a friend of mine from my school days. We had faced each other in ditter until our graduation, after which he had joined the Sovereign Knight’s Order and then died as a guard knight serving the

fourth prince. The faces of dead friends came to mind one after another, reopening old wounds that I usually kept stuffed into the corner of my mind.

“Reminds me of all the students I saw one year but not the next...” I muttered. After Werkestock fell, its land was split between Ahrensbach and Dunkelfelger, but not all students ended up in one duchy or the other. A lot of them died.

“Could you not get all emotional on me?” Hirschur said. “Now, I understand that we’re here to investigate why the feybeast appeared, but I’m not entirely sure what you are expecting. No ternisbefallens live on the Academy’s grounds; they would not be here unless someone brought them from old Werkestock.”

As she spoke, Hirschur discovered an old staircase. We checked it for footprints—of which there were none—and then checked with the knight that there was no evidence resting on the dust. Once that was done, we started descending into the basement.

“In any case,” Hirschur continued, “as I said during our staff meeting the other day, I believe we should be most suspicious of the students from Ahrensbach and Dunkelfelger.”

“Hirschur,” I said, my tone cautionary. The very idea of students from Dunkelfelger being involved was preposterous, but it seemed that my glare meant nothing to her.

“I understand that dormitory supervisors are prone to being emotional when it comes to their own duchies,” Hirschur said in a dry voice, “but it remains the most likely possibility. A student from another duchy would need to have purchased one in advance to have brought it here.”

“Buying a ternisbefallen? You can do that?”

Transporting black feybeasts was no simple matter—you had to be well-trained and very familiar with them just to handle the little ones, and ternisbefallens were so rare that some professors hadn’t even recognized the name during our meeting. The idea of students from some other duchy buying them hadn’t even occurred to me. I exchanged a glance with the Sovereign knight accompanying us.

“Of course, one small mistake is all it would take for the student bringing the beast to sustain injury, but it’s more than possible,” Hirschur said as we continued into the basement. “This very thing happened to us

ten-some years ago.”

“Did it?” I asked. Both the Sovereign knight and I met this claim with doubtful expressions, but she nodded.

“There was a student who bought a ternisbefallen from a Werkestock student and set it on Ferdinand. It was around the time when students were leaving the Royal Academy in droves to return home, and since Ferdinand’s little group managed to slaughter it, the event was never publicized. It was, after all, an internal dispute within Ehrenfest. This issue is no doubt of the same colors.”

Hirschur seemed to know something that I didn’t, and I soon found myself interested in what this research-crazed laboratory woman was thinking.

Basements were usually seen as commoner territory, but it seemed that knights had charged into this particular one to capture hiding nobles. The doors were broken, drawers hung open, and spiders had formed great nests among the remains of shattered pots. Everything was covered in dust, and there were no signs of anyone having been here since the dormitory was sealed off.

“Hirschur, what do you mean, ‘of the same colors’?” I asked.

“I mean that this was done by someone who resents Ehrenfest.”

“And why do you think that?”

“Have you forgotten that the trail of the black feybeast made a direct course from here to the Ehrenfest gathering spot? Dunkelfelger, Ahrensbach, Frenbeltag, the Sovereignty—it wouldn’t have been strange for the ternisbefallen to head to any of these gathering spots, especially considering how much richer in mana they are, but the beast didn’t seem to hesitate for even a moment.”

“Well, I seem to remember Ehrenfest’s gathering spot having tons of mana.”

“That would be because Lady Rozemyne healed it. From what I remember, our gathering spot was never particularly bountiful.”

I thought back to when we had followed the trail. It surprised me to learn that Hirschur was actually thinking over our situation, despite having done nothing but grumble about wanting to get back to her research.

“As for why they resent us, we can never know for sure unless we speak to them,” Hirschur continued. “Perhaps they are displeased that we

overtook them in the ranks, they have a personal grudge against one of our students, or there is another reason entirely." She sighed and counted each explanation on her fingers. Although she seemed disinterested and as though she would rather be anywhere else, at the same time, she looked weary from thinking the matter through as thoroughly as she could.

"Do you have any idea who the culprit might be?" I asked.

"I can say nothing for certain, of course... but I do count Fraularm among my suspects. Even compared to the students, she would have the least trouble bringing a ternisbefallen to the Academy."

"Careful, Hirschur. This isn't the place to be making accusations like that."

She glared up at the ceiling as though she were looking through to the floor above, searching for something. "I found this out only recently, but the divide between Ahrensbach and Ehrenfest has grown quite severe as of late. They are even treating my disciple, Raimund, as an immense security threat."

Professors in the Royal Academy had very few opportunities to learn about current interduchy relations. Most were reliant on what they could glean from listening to the chatter among students in the dormitory and observing their behavior in classes.

Upon noticing that I was hanging on her every word, Hirschur gave a comically exaggerated shrug. "Good grief. Why can I never simply take apprentices as I see fit?"

"You take them anyway, don't you? And the disciple you're talking about is the Ahrensbach student I met earlier today, right? You must be exaggerating. Besides, any problems between two duchies can be settled with a good ol' game of ditter."

"Dunkelfelger solutions are hardly going to work for us," Hirschur said with a grimace as she opened the door to the laundry room. Inside were the magic tools that attendants had used to receive dirty clothes from the upper floors and then return them once they were clean. It was pretty interesting to look around, since I normally wouldn't enter this kind of place.

That said... There's nothing left here.

"Putting aside our relationship with Ahrensbach," Hirschur said, "I pray that this incident was carried out by a lone actor with a grudge against the duchy."

“Hrm?”

“If we are dealing with a single criminal, they will surely not use the same method again; the incident has already drawn so much attention that even the Sovereign Knight’s Order is on guard.” She looked at the Sovereign knight. “However, if they have other goals and motivations, and Ehrenfest was simply a test subject for their plans, then we can expect to see more ternisbefallens on the Academy’s grounds. And no matter how many apprentice knights there may be here, black feybeasts cannot be defeated without black weapons. Any students unfortunate enough to encounter them will need to wait for the Sovereign knights to arrive. They are powerless otherwise, and it is crucial that the Sovereign Knight’s Order understands this and resolves to arrive in such situations as swiftly as possible.”

She may be a maniac when it comes to her research, but she’s still a teacher, huh?

I had assumed that Hirschur was entirely focused on getting to the bottom of this incident, but here she was, thinking of ways to deal with a subsequent attack. It hadn’t even occurred to me that she was acting with her students’ safety at heart, and it felt as though she was asking whether I was doing my part as a professor and thinking about how best to protect my own students.

“Think we’ll be able to set up precautionary lines of contact and get approval from the king for all professors of the knight course to use black weapons in times of emergency?” I asked.

“That’s the spirit. I would rather not have any more of my research time wasted.”

“Oh, c’mon!”

No sooner had I started to see Hirschur in a whole new light than she proved to me that she was the same old scientist. That said, her perspective was still valuable. As annoying as it was, I would look into improving our lines of communication.

“The kitchen was still covered in dust, and there was no sign of the stairs having been used,” I explained. “We also removed registration from all the hidden doors we passed along the way. Naturally, we found no traces of anything connected to the ternisbefallen. What about you two?”

Fraularm, who had been investigating the upper floors, puffed out her chest. “We found no traces of any ternisbefallens either, and there were no places for anyone to hide. Isn’t that right, Professor Gundolf?”

“...Indeed.”

As it turned out, there were no signs of ternisbefallens having used the dormitory’s teleportation circle. If someone had brought the beast in, they must have used teleportation circles from the other dormitories—that was our conclusion.

“I shall assist the Sovereign knights in writing our report to the king,” Gundolf continued, “so the rest of you may leave. Oh, but not you, Professor Rauffen. You have a responsibility as the one who summoned the Sovereign Knight’s Order, unfortunately.”

“Thank you, Professor Gundolf,” Hirschur said with a smile, practically leaping at the opportunity to leave. And with that, she made her exit.

Gundolf next turned to Fraularm. “You must be tired yourself, Professor Fraularm. You even had to investigate the second and third floors without using waschen. But thanks to your efforts, it is safe to say that Ahrensbach has been spared of any suspicion.”

“Indeed!” Fraularm replied, her mood improving dramatically. “I am quite relieved. I must go and report this to the aub and first wife.”

Gundolf saw Fraularm off with a smile, but no sooner had the door shut behind her than his expression turned gravely serious. “I decided it would be best for neither Hirschur, as the Ehrenfest dormitory supervisor, nor Fraularm, who cast waschen as soon as we entered, to hear what I am about to say.” He looked to the two Sovereign knights and said in a low voice, “The king must be warned.”

I swallowed hard as an immense pressure bore down on all those still present. What in the world had happened...?

“There were traces of the teleportation circle having been used,” Gundolf said.

“What?!” I shouted and then clapped a hand over my mouth, surprised by the loudness of my own voice. I turned to the knight who had accompanied Gundolf, still unable to contain my shock... but it seemed that he was just as taken aback.

“I was with you, but I noticed nothing of the sort,” he said questioningly.

“I was an archduke candidate once,” Gundolf said. “I took archduke

courses at the Academy. There are things I know to look for that others would not—things that you and Professor Fraularm would not have noticed."

The knight blinked several times; it seemed that he really hadn't noticed anything.

"I cannot speak the details, for it pertains to the syllabus of the archduke course," Gundolf continued. "If you wish to confirm it for yourselves, you will most likely need to bring a member of royalty who has graduated from the Academy as an archduke candidate with you."

Both the Sovereign knights and I nodded. Prince Hildebrand was the first person who came to mind, considering that he was a royal, but he wasn't yet old enough to have taken any lessons, let alone graduated. He wouldn't be able to help us in these circumstances.

Gundolf sighed and started stroking his beard in thought. "Lady Rozemyne's inquiry holds more meaning now than ever. She knows black spells that no person from the temple should even be aware of, and she performed healing on the gathering spot. These peculiarities, along with several others, mean there is much to be suspicious of."

"Wasn't Ehrenfest the victim here?" I asked, blinking in surprise. I was convinced from listening to Hirschur that the culprit was someone with a grudge against Ehrenfest.

"I do not think that Professor Fraularm was right about everything, what with how emotional she became, but her point that Ehrenfest has not suffered from this incident certainly was food for thought."

A ternisbefallen had gone on a rampage, the apprentice knights had slain it with black weapons granted to them by Lady Rozemyne, and the damaged gathering spot was healed to be even more bountiful than those of other duchies. If one looked at the results, it was true that Ehrenfest hadn't really been victims.

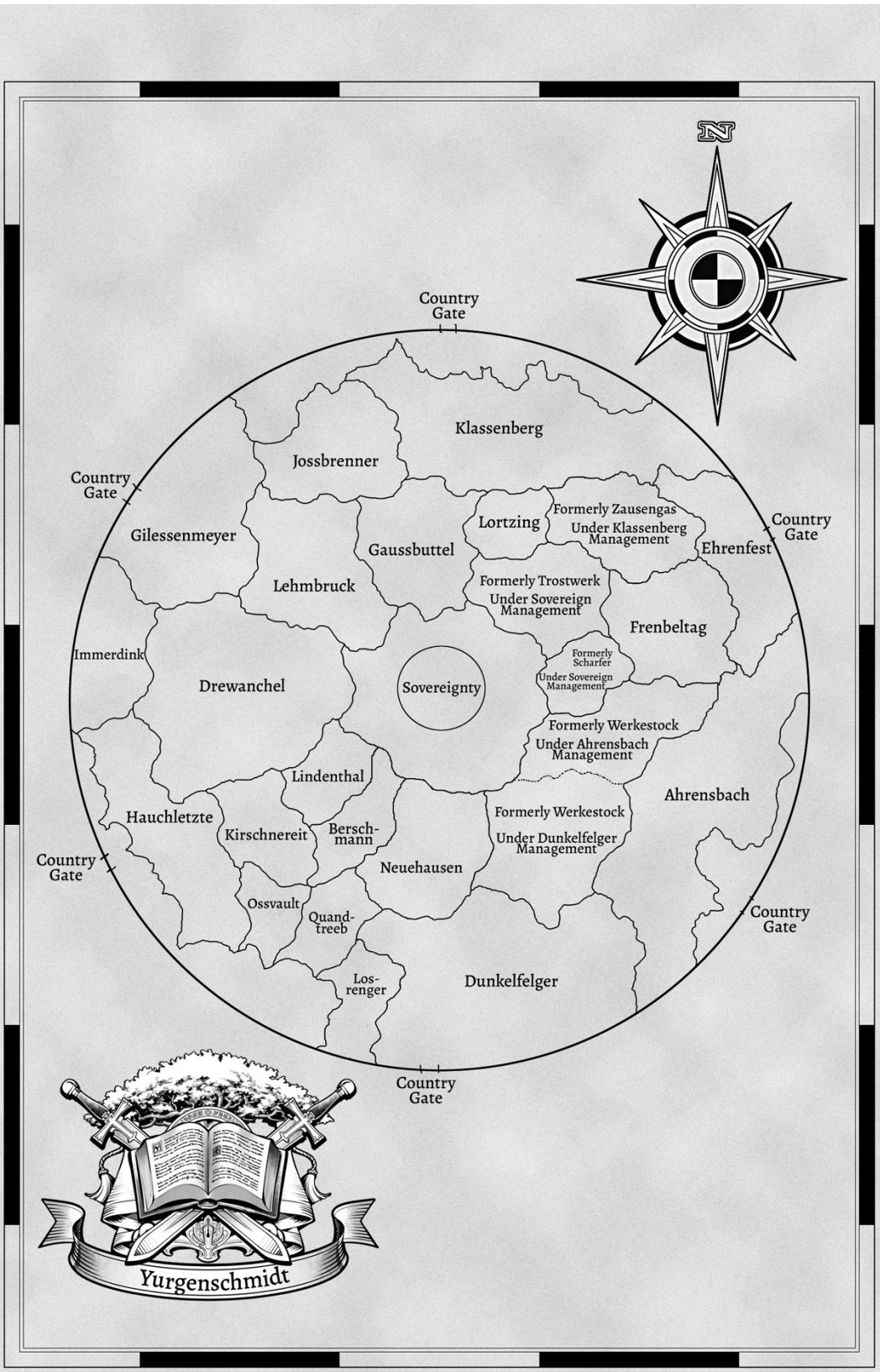
"We cannot discard the possibility that Ehrenfest was using the ternisbefallen to perform some experiment or another," Gundolf continued. "That dormitory has no supervisor present, which means the archduke candidates have complete power there."

Everyone knew that Hirschur was never at the dormitory, and although the students were tasked with reporting any goings-on, there was no way to know whether what they said was the truth. A chill ran down my spine; I

hadn’t thought about that at all.

“It may be wise to have one of the king’s retainers attend Lady Rozemyne’s inquiry... Perhaps his head scholar or the Sovereign knight commander,” Gundolf suggested. Not a single man disagreed.

N
Haldenzel
Herzfeld
Lehde
Khune
Asmann
Lancelle
Bauer
Cremer
Huber
Reunwalt
(Formerly) Zausengas Border Gate
Under Klassenberg Management
Country
Border Gate
Blon
Groschel
Glaz
Kirnberger
Ehrenfest
Central District
Hirsch
Frenbeltag Border Gate
Kark
Dahldolf
Haseney
Joisontak
Bessel
Leisegang
Gerlach
Forst
Wiltord
Buers
Garduhn
Illgner
Griebel
Ahrensbach Border Gate
Ehrenfest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Klassenberg
Jossbrenner
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Gilessenmeyer
Lortzing
Formerly Zausengas
Under Klassenberg Management
Country Gate
Ehrenfest
Gaussbuttel
Lehmbruck
Formerly Trostwerk
Under Sovereign Management
Frenbeltag
Immerdink
Drewanchel
Sovereignty
Formerly Scharfer
Under Sovereign Management
Formerly Werkestock
Under Ahrensbach Management
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Bersch-mann
Formerly Werkestock
Under Dunkelfelger Management
Country Gate
Neuehausen
Ossvault
Quand-treeb
Country Gate
Los-renger
Dunkelfelger
Country Gate
Yurgenschmidt

Afterword

Hello again, it's Miya Kazuki. Thank you very much for reading *Ascendance of a Bookworm: Part 4 Volume 6*.

Rozemyne's second year at the Royal Academy has begun, and she's somehow causing even more problems than before! She produced divine instruments in class, tore apart her bed canopy with a water gun, and more or less went really wild. At the same time, she has to deal with various incidents that she's hardly to blame for. Rauffen keeps pushing her to take the knight course, Schwartz and Weiss ask her to supply mana to the statue of a goddess, Prince Hildebrand appears in the library again and again, Hirschur's disciple turns out to be an Ahrensbach student, and a ternisbefallen appears at the Ehrenfest gathering spot.

In any case, Rozemyne has her hands full dealing with a whole range of problems. She understands that her guardians are going to have a lot on their plates too, but that doesn't make her any less upset about surrendering her reading time to return to Ehrenfest.

This volume's prologue is told from Charlotte's perspective. Wilfried getting engaged to Rozemyne means he is guaranteed to become the next archduke. Charlotte can never become the aub as a result, no matter how hard she works, but she still considers Rozemyne to be her savior and strives to support her.

The epilogue is told from Sylvester's perspective. Rozemyne's guardians can do nothing but read the mountains of reports concerning her antics, and they soon find themselves nursing very intense headaches.

As usual, my inspiration for the short stories came from reader requests. In this volume, we focus on Roderick and Rauffen.

Roderick's story shows what went on behind the scenes after he resolved to give Rozemyne his name. It covers him speaking with Rozemyne's retainers and preparing to gather his ingredients with the apprentice knights of the former Veronica faction.

I think it also offers a glimpse of what Hartmut does in the shadows.

Rauffen’s story is about the professors exploring the old Werkestock dormitory. It shows what they thought of the ternisbefallen incident and their relationships with each other—things that Rozemyne can’t see on her own.

The professors teaching Rozemyne’s grade tend to be casual with each other, but they need to be more polite with the professors teaching other grades. Each professor also has their own feelings and perspective on the matter, rather than them all sharing the same opinion. What will happen when Rozemyne gets unusual suspicions cast on her and even the king’s retainers are involved...? Look forward to finding out in the next volume.

Shiina-sama provided character designs for Hirschur’s disciple Raimund and Hildebrand’s head attendant Arthur in this volume. I must admit, I’m especially a fan of how disheveled Raimund looks! It’s very much like him to tie his scarf around his waist so that it doesn’t get in the way of his brewing.

I also have an announcement to make: *Ascendance of a Bookworm* is now getting an anime adaptation! More details will soon be announced on a dedicated website.

Although some of you might be disappointed that the voice actors aren’t the same as those used in the drama CDs, the new cast is very extravagant, with a wide range of veterans. I was surprised when I saw their names, and even more surprised when they were auditioning!

Please do take a look at the introductory PV. I can’t wait for you to see the characters and the lower city brought to life! The anime staff decided to base it on illustrations from the light novels and manga, while expanding the *Bookworm* world and atmosphere even further than before. I asked for the style and color of the buildings to change as they went from the poor south of the city to the rich north where the Gilberta Company is situated, for the generic characters in the background to have set hairstyles and skirt lengths, and so on. Looking back, I gave them quite a lot of specific—and probably annoying—instructions.

Also, it’s been decided that there’s going to be a third drama CD, which will go on sale at the same time as Part 4 Volume 7. It focuses on Roderick’s name-swearing, and I hope you’ll enjoy hearing all the conversations between the Royal Academy students.

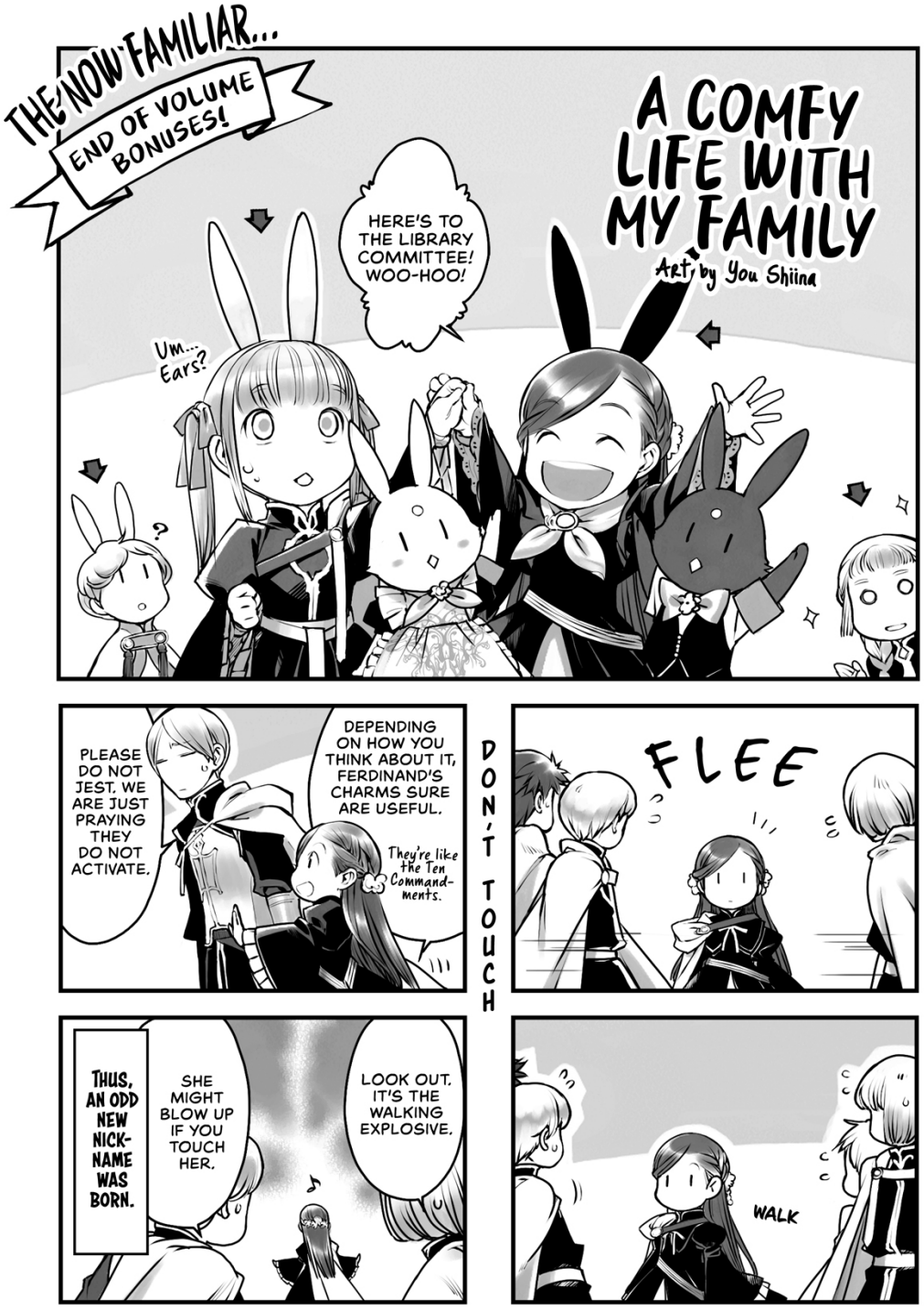
The cover for this volume shows the gathering of the Library

Committee. There’s Rozemyne, Schwartz, and Weiss, and now Hannelore and Hildebrand too! The two shumils are wearing their new outfits. Lieseleta’s embroidery is super cute.

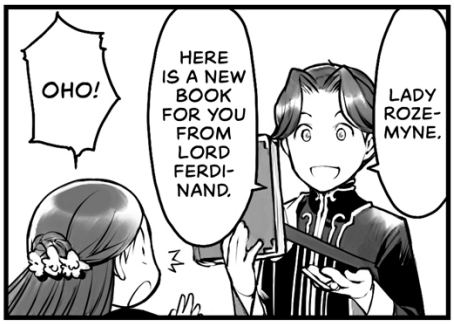
This volume’s colored illustration shows the apprentice knights readying their weapons for battle during the ternisbefallen hunt. It also shows Rozemyne using a black weapon against a black feybeast, which hopefully makes her look a bit more hard-boiled. Thank you very much, Shiina-sama.

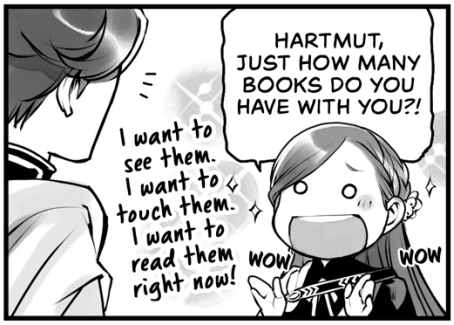
And finally, I offer up my highest thanks to everyone who read this book. May we meet again in Part 4 Volume 7.

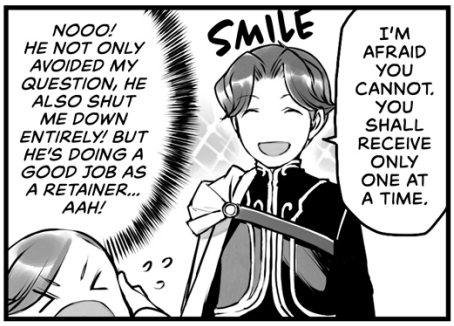
January 2019, Miya Kazuki


THE NOW FAMILIAR...
END OF VOLUME BONUSES!
A COMFY LIFE WITH MY FAMILY
Art by You Shiina
HERE'S TO THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE! WOO-HOO!
Um... Ears?
?
PLEASE DO NOT JEST. WE ARE JUST PRAYING THEY DO NOT ACTIVATE.
DEPENDING ON HOW YOU THINK ABOUT IT, FERDINAND'S CHARMS SURE ARE USEFUL.
They're like the Ten Commandments.
DON'T TOUCH
FLEE
THUS, AN ODD NEW NICKNAME WAS BORN.
SHE MIGHT BLOW UP IF YOU TOUCH HER.
LOOK OUT. IT'S THE WALKING EXPLOSIVE.
WALK

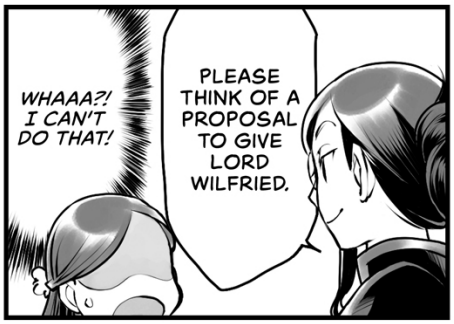
HIGHLY SKILLED

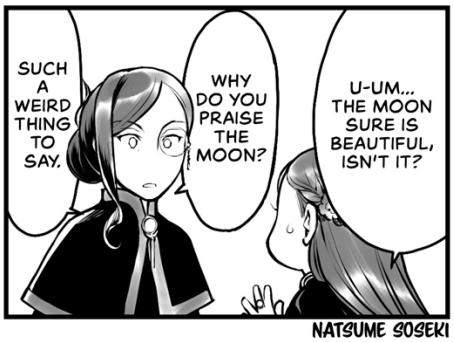




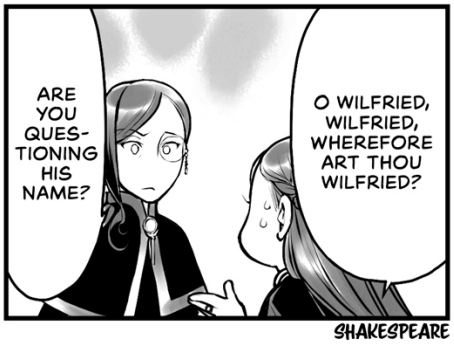


A MASSIVE VICTORY FOR LOVE

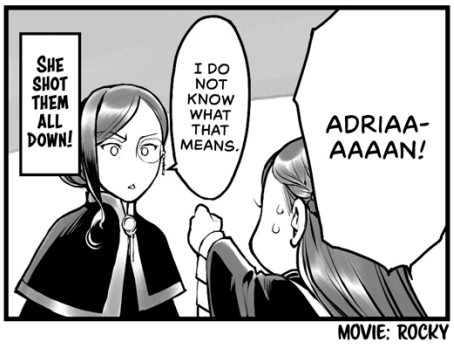




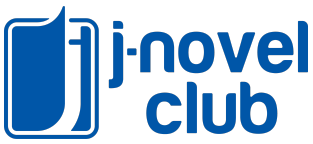
NATSUME SOSEKI



SHAKESPEARE



MOVIE: ROCKY



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Ascendance of a Bookworm: Part 4 Founder of the Royal Academy's So-Called Library Committee Volume 6
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Edited by Kieran Redgewell

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